

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

—
Mary Eirwen Jones

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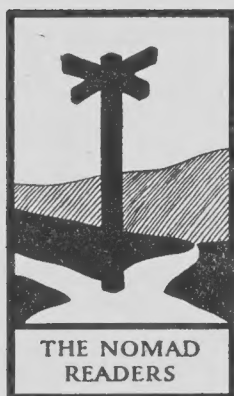


"Puss ! Puss !" called Martin, coaxingly

The Redskin Trail

by

MARY EIRWEN JONES



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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. MARSDEN'S RANGE	7
2. HUNTING THE BUFFALO	13
3. THE HUNTERS' CAMP	20
4. A FIGHT WITH A BEAR	25
5. THE RED INDIAN	31
6. THROUGH SNOW-DRIFTS	37
7. THE YOUNG HUNTER	45
8. THE WITCH POOL	52
9. FOLLOWING THE TRAIL	56
10. TRADERS' GATE	62
11. FRIENDLY ENEMIES	69
12. HOMEWARD BOUND	76
13. SEEBA AGAIN !	84
14. THE END OF THE TRAIL	92

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>"Puss ! Puss !" called Martin, coaxingly</i>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	PAGE
<i>The horses moved onward at a steady pace</i>	9
<i>With a start Martin looked round</i>	15
<i>Barcoll turned, feigning flight</i>	19
<i>Martin was flung to the foot of a precipice</i>	23
<i>Then with a roaring rush the bear came at him</i>	29
<i>The great Indian chief knelt down</i>	35
<i>The squaw's utensils were few and crude</i>	41
<i>In single file was a band of about seventy Indian warriors ..</i>	49
<i>"I am Ralph," said the boy</i>	65
<i>The dog sledge sped over the sparkling snow</i>	79

CHAPTER 1

MARSDEN'S RANGE

It was a day late in October. The driver of a Squaw River cart made his way determinedly through the broad valley that cut through the Canadian plain.

"A storm brewing!" he said shortly to the lad at his side, pointing at the same time to the flock of wild geese flying southwards. "Storms and winter upon us. You've chosen a fine time, lad, to come and live at Marsden's Range."

The boy, Martin Marsden, a tall lad just turned fourteen, smiled in answer. He had little choice in coming to Marsden's Range he thought to himself. His father had been killed in a street accident in Montreal. Soon after, his invalid mother had died, leaving him in charge of his little sister, Brenda, aged five. Arrangements had been made for sending the children to Marsden's Range, a lonely settlement on the Squaw River. But, in the meantime, fever had assailed the poor district where Martin lived, and had taken a severe toll of life, claiming little Brenda as one of its first victims.

Jasper drove on steadfastly, also deep in thought. The birds had ceased singing and the cattle in the distance lowed apprehensively, gathered together in groups among the trees. Overhead, the sky was a hard, glazed dome of blue, but presently the sun was obliterated by a black bar across its face.

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

Away, across the valley, the lightning flashed and flared fitfully.

The storm reached the Squaw River, and Jasper, with wisdom born of experience and knowledge of the valley, sought shelter in the ruins of a lime-kiln, festooned with ivy and within easy reach of the path.

Martin sat upright in the cart. He was fascinated as the storm entered the smaller valleys to the north, marching as it were, slowly and majestically towards the higher peaks. From the cavity where he and Jasper and the two horses sheltered, it seemed as though the very summits of the hills were being hurled into the narrow glens below by the crashings and the reverberations of the thunder. The vivid lightning lit up the mountainsides with eye-searing flashes. As the storm approached still nearer, the echoing peals of thunder were succeeded by short cataclysmic shocks. Simultaneously streams of vivid light ran erratically down from the heavens to the stunned, dazed earth.

Great sheets of rain fell as though the bottoms of the clouds had fallen out. Suddenly a great gust of wind arose. It shrieked madly through the valley and exhausted itself in its onslaught on the hills above. Once again tortured rain fell, pain-stricken. And then, in greater moderation, it formed itself into a blinding mist, and finally bubbled and babbled on the many paths through the trees. From his shelter Martin could see that the tempest was retreating to the south. Now and then it roared and growled, and threatened to return. But soon a great peace and silence followed. Jasper called to the horses and they continued their journey. Sunset, rosy and opalescent, shaded the land.

MARSDEN'S RANGE

Soon afterwards the cart left the woodland path and entered more open lanes. A damp air was blowing up and the frogs were beginning to peep. As he watched the sun setting in a low red sky, Martin smiled. It was a happy omen of his new life at Marsden's Range.



The horses moved onward at a steady pace

The horses moved onward at a steady pace. On both sides of their path Martin could see rich green meadows intersected by canal-like brooks, now full and overflowing. Beyond the meadows on the west was a distant stretch of pine woods that showed dark against the clear sky. Centred between the pine woods and the hillside was a settlement, the smoking

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

chimneys suggesting the proximity of life in a countryside otherwise desolate.

"Are we far away from Marsden's Range now?" Martin asked.

"Look! Patches shall give you your answer," answered Jasper.

He set free Patches, the horse which had been tethered to the side of the rumbling cart. With a joyous neigh the horse galloped past them and was lost in the gathering darkness.

"Trust a horse to know when he's home," chuckled Jasper.

Then Jasper cupped his hands over his mouth and called. The echo seemed to return from each corner of the quiet prairie. And then the single echo was caught up in a score of others as dogs ran barking from all sides, greeting the newcomers. The light of a lantern bobbed up and down on the path throwing out long, gesticulating shadows, and friendly voices were raised in welcome. The main gate opened and a husky voice exchanged a curt greeting with Jasper.

Jasper jumped down from the cart and reached a helping hand to Martin. But the boy, all eagerness, had already alighted and now stood hesitant at the horse's head.

"See there," said Jasper, "your aunts are at the door awaiting you. Run along in."

"You have weathered the storm safely, Jasper?" questioned a woman's anxious voice.

"Aye, aye, ma'am," answered Jasper, with his usual chuckle. "And sure I've brought you a stormy petrel."

"Welcome to Marsden's Range," said Aunt

MARSDEN'S RANGE

Ruth, as she removed the rough deerskin from Martin's shoulders. "Ah! You are dry, despite the storm. Jasper was wise and must have sought shelter."

Once his eyes had grown accustomed to the flickering candle-light, Martin studied the scene before him.

There are people with whom one is immediately at sympathy. Martin was drawn to his Aunt Ruth from the moment he saw her. For long years after he was to recall with studied exactness his first remembrance of her. She was dressed in exquisite white cambric, fastened at the throat by wisps of lavender ribbon; through her gown here and there were touches of the same colour. Aunt Ruth was a very beautiful woman, Martin decided, and all the more beautiful in that she was so alien to the rude, rough setting of the settlement. Martin was much attracted by her frank manner and charming voice. She was now talking to a tall, distinguished-looking man, whose fine features, keen earnest glance, and thoughtful expression made him very striking in appearance. Forming a third in the group, dropping in a word or two of welcome at intervals, was an elderly lady, still full of vigour, though her hair was silver. Martin was attracted by the sharp and restless sparkle of her eyes, strangely joined with the most benevolent of smiles.

"Here are your Aunt Isabel and Uncle Malcolm," said Aunt Ruth.

Martin greeted them, smiling shyly.

"You are very like your father," said Uncle Malcolm, quietly.

"Like him, too, in his appetite when he was a

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

boy, I expect," said elderly Aunt Isabel briskly.

"Your Aunt Ruth will take you to your room. Now don't be long, laddie. Hot food is waiting."

Aunt Ruth led him to his room and left him to prepare himself for the evening meal. He found himself in a goodly-sized room where the furniture was simple but comfortable, and in good taste.

The coverings, he noticed, were of a flowered cotton fabric, very pleasing in colouring. On a mahogany table were writing materials and papers, and in a bookcase, also of mahogany, were many books. On the walls were engravings of sporting subjects and—oh joy! Martin leaped across to an alcove in the room to look at some guns, weapons, and skis which seemed to invite immediate action. But his inspection was interrupted by a gentle tap on the door. Aunt Ruth reminded him that they were waiting.

After a hearty meal they drew together in the genial warmth of a crackling log fire. A delightful sense of comfort and of enjoyment prevailed, numbing the depths of Martin's bereavements. Soon he was speaking to his relatives of his dead parents and little sister. They encouraged him to speak, asking questions now and again, knowing that it eased the lad's mind to speak of his loved ones to those who had known them.

"We want you to feel at home from the beginning," said Uncle Malcolm kindly, as they bade each other good night. "You will learn to love your good aunts and, who knows, since I have grown crippled and almost useless with wounds that seem beyond healing, you—you, Martin Marsden—may yet become the Marsden of Marsden's Range."

CHAPTER 2

HUNTING THE BUFFALO

A SOUND night's sleep does much to revive a boy's spirits. Martin was up early. There was so much to see—and do. He renewed acquaintanceship with Jasper, was introduced to the dogs, inspected the long row of cattle-sheds that skirted one end of the farmhouse, surveyed the orchard already bare of its fruit, and by-passed the huts of the servants of the Range. The clear air and bright sunshine were invigorating to the boy, long cooped in a drab and sunless city courtyard. He responded readily to Jasper's invitation to accompany him to the pond to water the horses.

"In better time for breakfast tomorrow, Martin," was Aunt Ruth's gentle remonstrance when Martin arrived late for the meal.

"Yes, Aunt, I'm sorry!" said Martin contritely enough. But at that moment a stranger tapped lightly on the living-room door and Martin forgot all the precepts he had learned about punctuality at the sight of the wonderful man.

The stranger had tethered a fine horse to the gatepost, and had retained his gun on entering the house. He bore himself with a jaunty air of self-assurance, and tapped on his many-tasselled riding-boots as he strode into the house.

It was apparent that the stranger had come to

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

see Uncle Malcolm on some business of a private nature. When Martin had finished his meal his aunts told him he was free to explore further afield, provided he put himself in Jasper's charge. Martin was in no way averse to his guardian, for he already felt a deep affection for the old and trusted farm servant.

When at last Martin found Jasper, attending to a lame pony, he questioned the old man as to whether some wandering hunters he had heard about were dangerous.

"Dangerous, eh?" queried Jasper, stroking his curly beard. "Well, not *dangerous*! They're dashing enough, jovial and gay. A careless lot. Your uncle finds it wise to keep on the right side of them. No one's altogether wicked. They're always ready to give a bit of help—provided they're well paid for it. Just turn round and look at the specimen behind you," Jasper chuckled.

With a start Martin looked round. Confronting him was the gaily-dressed rider who had interrupted his breakfast. Martin's cheeks tingled. The rider must have heard how he had questioned Jasper; must have heard Jasper's answers too. But the stranger's brilliant smile reassured him.

"Come friends!" said the stranger, holding out his hand. "I am Roland—Roland Dupree."

Martin was fascinated by the sight of the man and held out his hand readily enough.

"Friends," repeated Roland, rolling his "r's" and reflecting his French ancestry. "Jasper, Mist' Marsden says you are to give the boy the pony, Robin."

A shadow crossed the old man's face. Was

HUNTING THE BUFFALO

Roland going to take the lad from him? He, Jasper, would have liked to have kept the orphan boy under his wing.

"Robin's got himself lamed," said Jasper, grudgingly.



With a start Martin looked round

"Find another pony then," said Roland, impatiently.

"He can have Rufus," muttered Jasper quietly, "but—but—what for?"

"What for, Jasper? What for?" cried Roland. He slapped his gauntleted glove between the old man's shoulders, almost winding him. "Bring

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

Rufus here immediately, Martin and I are off to hunt the buffalo."

It was now Martin's turn to lose his breath, overcome with excitement. To hunt the buffalo! Adventure seemed to be crowding on his path.

The boy thought that once Jasper had led Rufus into the stable yard, he and Roland would set off together. But Roland led him back to the house and there, with the help of Uncle Malcolm, Martin was dressed for the expedition. The aunts caught something of the boy's eagerness and ran hither and thither, collecting garments and equipment which they brought for Roland's inspection.

Martin caught sight of his reflection in the hall mirror and could not refrain from admiring what he saw. On his head he wore an old but very comfortable fur cap of his uncle's. It fitted snugly with a cape effect, falling well around his shoulders, and with ear-pieces which laced securely under his chin.

An old deerskin coat fitted around him generously, and was made yet more snug by the broad, studded belt that Aunt Ruth fastened around his waist. Glancing at himself sideways in the mirror, Martin saw that his outline bulged considerably where the coat pockets were, for Roland had filled them with supplies of food.

Martin's delight grew when Uncle Malcolm told him that as a member of the hunting party he would be allowed to camp out for a night or two—perhaps three; it depended on how soon they could locate the buffalo.

"Every inch a hunter," chuckled Jasper, as he peered in from the hall doorway whither he had led the harnessed Rufus.

HUNTING THE BUFFALO

"Take great care of Martin, Roland," murmured the aunts as they stood to wave farewell from the steps.

"Ye'll need to take great care of him since Barcoll is to be of your party," said Jasper, snappily. "He's handsome enough, a clever shot, but I've no trust in him."

A lithe and swarthy hunter, Barcoll, had joined the party. He greeted the ladies courteously enough, and Martin speculated as to whether he had heard Jasper's bitter criticism. The boy's attention was caught by the sight of his uncle hobbling forth on his sticks.

"Happy hunting, laddie," said Malcolm Marsden, sighing wistfully as he remembered how he had often led the hunt himself. "Happy hunting! You go as my representative. I give you the symbol of my authority." He fastened a hunting-knife in Martin's belt.

The boy fingered it lovingly. He felt equal to the men now, even though they bore guns. Uncle Malcolm must have sensed the boy's longing for a gun.

"You shall have a gun when you return," he said.

"Yes, when you return," echoed the aunts.

Much was to happen before Martin's return, but at that moment none of them could foretell what was to happen. To Martin's surprise Jasper joined the party in his rumbling cart.

"We can't do without Father Jasper," beamed Roland in explanation. "His cart will creak homeward loaded with game."

They met Barcoll's men and horses at the white

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

pine, and then continued their course along the bank of the Squaw River. Martin stared fascinated as he watched a light canoe of birch-bark skim the water. The skilful paddler exchanged words of greeting with the hunting party, his voice startling a heron fishing avidly in the crystal-clear water. Clear of the river, the hunting party began to ascend a hillside, hastening its pace as dark, moving specks became visible to the naked eye. Barcoll gave a cry and the horsemen rode away over the open plain. Martin obeyed Roland's order and followed at leisurely pace with Jasper and the cart.

But when he saw the horsemen make a wild charge on the buffalo herd, Martin loosened rein, eager to join them. But Jasper said cautiously :

"Keep close by me, young Martin. We'll be in at the kill yet."

Martin saw one buffalo suddenly turn on the huntsmen, his head thrust downward when he had gazed his fill on the foolhardy men. Barcoll greeted the buffalo's action with a whoop of delight, and his chief man, Dain, joined in giving chase to the infuriated animal. The staccato sound of a rifle-shot broke through the momentary silence. It was with difficulty that Martin withdrew his eyes from the scene to help old Jasper draw the cart to the lee of a small wood. The boy had difficulty in controlling his excited pony.

"Steady ! Steady, lad," urged Jasper, laying a gnarled hand on Martin's rein. "We'll have much to do in a few moments."

Martin stood up in his stirrups. He could see that the maddened buffalo was wheeling round, hampered by the bulk of its unwieldy body. Having

HUNTING THE BUFFALO

enraged the animal sufficiently Barcoll turned, feigning flight. The beast thudded after him, till a bullet from Dain's gun shortened his speed. The



Barcoll turned, feigning flight

bullet had struck the raging beast between the eyes, but he only shook his head in haughty defiance. Onward he plunged till he was within a few feet of Barcoll's horse, when a swift lunge from the huntsman's long-bladed knife ended the buffalo's life.

CHAPTER 3

THE HUNTERS' CAMP

MARTIN had expected that he would have been given a task in the loading of the fallen quarry, but Roland called him, instructing him in the types of wood to be collected for the camp fire.

It was Martin's first experience of camping and his delight was deep. One thing alone marred his pleasure, the coming of a messenger to recall his friend Roland to the Marsden Range. Roland seemed to hesitate as to whether to take Martin back with him. He saw the boy's pleasure at the prospect of camping with the hunters, and was loth to deprive him of his treat. Roland consoled himself with the reflection that Jasper was there to take care of the boy, and Jasper, he knew, shared his dislike of Barcoll. Roland called Martin aside, explained that he was called back to the Range to meet a trader who had ridden a long way to do business with him.

"Take great heed of what I say, my young friend," said Roland. "Never move an arm's length away from Jasper's side."

Martin nodded, glad to find that Roland was not suggesting his immediate return home.

"Tell them I'm very happy here," he said, as he waved Roland goodbye.

He stood watching until Roland and his horse were a tiny speck in the distance, and then returned to the fascinating task of wielding the frying-pan

THE HUNTERS' CAMP

on the roaring camp fire. At intervals Martin left the cooking in order to shoo away the hungry birds which defied both smoke and mortals to reach the savoury morsels that attracted them.

Songs and tales followed in endless succession when the meal was eaten and Martin voted the hunter's life the best possible under the sun. Dain had helped Martin to prepare his bed and his blankets were spread out on the dry fine brush.

"Early to bed," advised Jasper, seeing that Martin was long since tired, unaccustomed as he was to a day in the saddle.

"Good-night, young 'un," said Dain kindly enough as he tucked the blankets around Martin.

The boy thought of all the strange happenings of the day. Then he began to count the stars winking mischievously at him through the trees, and soon he was fast asleep. Two hours later Jasper roused him.

"Young Martin, waken—listen," he said. "A herd of your uncle's cattle has been traced to the clearing just beyond. Six of the Range men have been searching for them to the northward for well over a fortnight. I must take them back home before they stray further."

"What ! Must you go now ?" said Martin, sitting up in astonishment. "Must you go now ?" he repeated. "But—but you can't find your way back in the dark."

"Easier for Jasper across the prairie by starlight," said the old man, with his familiar chuckle. Then he added, "I am loth to leave you here, but I shall be back in the morning with perhaps Roland and some of the Range men with me. Barcoll has given me his word that he will not strike camp till either

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

Roland or I return. I trust that he will keep his word. Keep close to Dain, Martin. He won't let you come to harm."

Martin woke early. His limbs were stiff and aching, not so much with the previous day's riding as with the hoar-frost that had numbed them during the night. Martin shook himself, rather like a young collie, for true to the prairie custom he had slept in his clothes during the night. Barcoll watched the lad with amusement, then urged him to shake off his stiffness by rounding up the horses and driving them to a neighbouring small lake for their morning drink.

It was Dain who prepared breakfast, and an excellent repast it was to the hungry boy who sat down to it. Martin looked questioningly at Dain when Barcoll gave the order to saddle the horses. Could Barcoll be striking camp after his solemn promise to Jasper to await the return of the Marsden men? If so, then Martin must defy him and wait there alone until Jasper or Roland came. But Dain set Martin's mind at rest.

"We're off for the morning," he said, "to get our next buffalo."

There could be nothing wrong in joining them for the morning's sport, Martin decided. So he saddled Rufus with some slight assistance from Dain. They rode circuitously for a long distance without sighting a single buffalo. Barcoll had made a suggestion about returning for a midday meal at the camp when, quite unexpectedly, a great buffalo lumbered on a solitary trail towards them.

Dain shouted a warning cry to Martin, urged him to remain still in his saddle at the foot of a great pine tree nearby. Barcoll gave no thought to the boy but,

THE HUNTERS' CAMP

caught up in the spirit of the chase, prepared for the tussle and the kill. Dain thereupon tightened his saddle girths, adjusted his rifle, and followed in hot pursuit.

Martin stayed at the foot of the pine tree. He would witness the kill just as he had done on the pre-



Martin was flung to the foot of a precipice

vious day. What a tale he would have to tell when he returned to Marsden's Range ! He watched the startled buffalo retreat towards him, maddened by the presence of his pursuers. It seemed to breathe forth fire as it came onward, churning up the ground beneath it. Martin saw that he was in a line of safety, hidden by the tall pine tree from the vision of the

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

angry beast. But when it lunged against a fallen tree trunk, the animal uttered a great bellow which resounded again and again through the silent forest. The startled Rufus neighed his terror. Without warning he reared, and Martin was flung to the foot of a sharp and steep precipice.

* * * * *

Barcoll, Dain, and their men had had a busy morning, for the first solitary buffalo had been the herald of the herd. With an ease that was altogether ridiculous and which took the edge off the adventure of the chase, they killed buffalo after buffalo. The herd had panicked and fell an easy victim to the knives and bullets of the hunters.

Tired and spent, they returned to their camp, too weary to enjoy the meal they had prepared for themselves.

“Where’s the lad?” said Dain briefly. “What—where—who has seen the lad?”

But the men merely shook their heads. They had not given the lad a thought since their departure in the morning.

“I shouldn’t worry, Dain,” said Barcoll, indifferently. “The lad’s around I guess, and in any case we’re not his nursemaids. He’s a head on his shoulders, surely.”

But Dain remained unsatisfied, and kept peering through the trees and listening intently as he ate his food.

“There’s comfort in the thought that that pony of the boy’s is of sound breed. Martin will have the sense to loosen the reins if he’s lost the way. The pony will lead him home.”

So did Dain seek vainly to ease his troubled mind.

CHAPTER 4

A FIGHT WITH A BEAR

RUFUS galloped riderless over a stony ridge path. Martin lay at the foot of the sharp precipice. There he lay for many hours, quite oblivious of the return of the hunters to Marsden's Range.

Very gradually, life oozed back to his shaken body, and as his strength returned he did his utmost to stand up and continue his way. He made sure that no bones were broken and then tried once again to seek a path up to the higher level from which he had fallen. But he was too sick and too dazed for a time but to lie there and consider his situation.

Martin was about to start his way in a southerly direction when he saw that behind where he had lain in his fall was a kind of door, or shutter, fastened to the wall of the cliff. It had not been visible at first for ivy and creepers hung in thick clusters over its surface. Closer inspection revealed to Martin that he had fallen into a kind of disused lime-kiln, rather like that in which he and Jasper had sheltered in the rain storm that had overtaken them on their journey to Marsden's Range.

"This cave or shelter is ideal," Martin said to himself. "It is quite near the camping place and so there will be a better chance of their finding me here than if I wander away in any direction. Again,

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

this old kiln links up, I expect, with the other in which Jasper and I sheltered. The Squaw River is near. When I feel stronger I shall follow that and so reach home."

Martin stepped into the cave. It smelt earthy and damp, and the boy's footsteps sounded hollow. Solid timbers supported the roof and a wide, iron grating served as a window. As he explored Martin wondered to what use the cavity could have been put in earlier days.

Martin took out his hunting knife and cut the creepers that clustered round the grating window, thereby letting in a great spectrum of light which seemed to brighten up the cave even in its furthest reaches. His attention was caught by the glint of metal towards the centre of the cave. He crossed over and found it to be a broken metal bar, rusted on its surface, but with a point retaining a sharp edge. Throwing the iron bar to the ground he went further into the cave. Here it was warmer and the floor was paved not by loose earth as at the entrance, but by great smooth cobbles.

Suddenly Martin heard shuffling footsteps approaching. A rescuer perhaps ! Eagerly he looked up, but could see nothing at first for his eyes were misty. Then sight and understanding became confused and the boy stood motionless, for what he saw entering the cave was not a man—but a bear !

The great animal padded its way into the shelter, seeking safety from the storm. Martin swung round swiftly. He must make a hasty exit before the bear saw him. The great shutter door stood ajar and Martin realised that he must reach it quickly, silently. Hidden by a wooden pillar he watched

A FIGHT WITH A BEAR

the bear, scarcely eighteen feet away. And then, as if sensing the presence of a human, the bear turned and saw the boy. The bear raised himself on his hind legs, his red eyes rolling and then made for Martin. With the instinct of self-preservation Martin made for the door. Ere he reached it a mighty gust of wind and sleet blew into the cave, shutting the door with a resounding slam !

The noise of the door slamming frightened the bear, and it retreated to the far end of the cave. This movement gave Martin a little breathing-space, and he heaved with all his might at the heavy door. In vain. It had jammed firmly on its rusty hinges. He was locked in with a hungry bear !

He leaned against the fast-closed door, and through the confusion of terror-stricken thoughts that crowded his brain, he seemed to hear his mother's voice saying, as she had so often said in their old home, "Great your strength if great your need."

The thought brought courage to Martin. He looked at the grating window and was grateful for the light it let into the cave. He took his knife from his belt and made straight for the bear. Ere he reached him, he made a sudden, swift movement to the left, confusing the animal with his greater quickness of movement. But, quick as it was, the bear almost equalled the boy's movements, and Martin felt its hot breath just behind him.

When he reached the window grating, Martin shook the rusty bars, in the hope that some might be loose, but they held fast. Then he ran to the back of the cave, but quickly returned to the area of the window and its greater light. He had realised that

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

in the darker depths of the cave, the bear's sense of smell would be as helpful to him as his sight, while he himself would be handicapped in the darkness.

Martin ran to the centre pillar, brandishing his knife in his own defence. He turned to meet the bear. Onward it came, growling savagely. Martin played for time, dodged this way and that, turned, redoubled, dodged again. Again and again he repeated this tactic but realised that he could not maintain it for long.

Martin's courage, his quickness of eye, his swiftness of foot were serving him well. Soon, however, he must attack the bear with predetermined action if he wished to survive. Attack is the best form of defence, Martin had once heard someone say, and the thought gave him courage now.

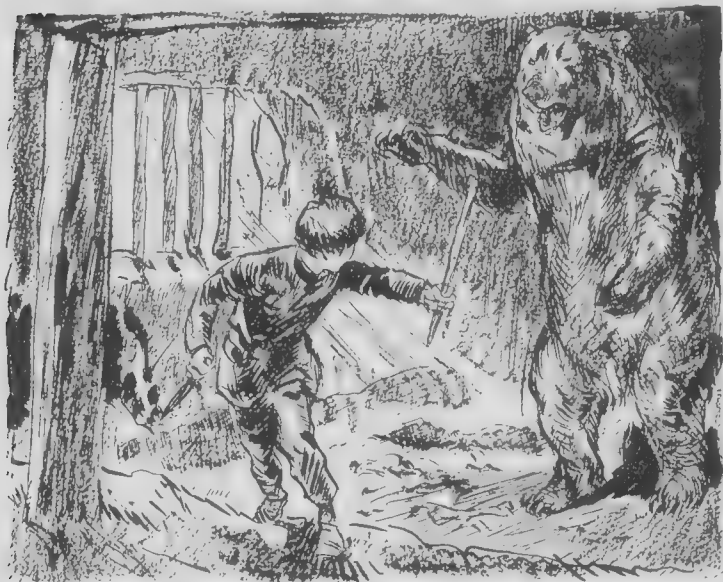
His foot tripped against the metal bar he had found on his entry to the cave. Why had he not thought of it before? It would add to the worth of his knife if he could lay his hands on it. If he could lay hands on it! For the bear was between him and it. He made a feint towards the right and then to the left, infuriating the bear still further. With a wild rush the bear struck out, missing Martin's head by a few inches. The boy stumbled to the left and ran to a neighbouring pillar. Fortune favours the brave, for he reached out and armed himself with the metal bar. The moment had come to attack.

For two minutes, though it seemed as many hours to the waiting Martin, there was no movement, and the only sounds were the short breathing of the boy and the savage panting of the hungry beast.

Then, with a roaring rush, the bear came at him.

A FIGHT WITH A BEAR

Martin sprang to one side, knifing the beast as he did so. The knife went in and out again. The metal bar, swung adroitly, hit the animal on the head. But all were too late for Martin's complete safety. The animal wrenched the lad closely to its own



Then with a roaring rush the bear came at him

maddened body, determined never to let go. The cave and the bear seemed to circle round and round Martin, and he was about to become senseless in the embrace of the savage beast.

"A fight to the death it shall be," Martin reminded himself, renewing his purpose to make a final effort. With a swiftness that was surprising

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

even to himself, he hit the bear upon the snout with the metal bar. Taken quite unawares, the injured animal uttered a howl of pain, released his hold on Martin, and retreated to the window grating, howling and moaning.

Martin took the offensive again, raised the metal bar high above his head and stunned the savage beast. The knife completed the task, and the bear lay on the floor of the cave.

Martin was extremely anxious to get outside away from the cave of horror, and now that the bear lay dead he renewed his attack on the door, with more favourable results. As he stepped out into the fresh air once more he uttered a prayer of thankfulness at his escape. Before he closed the shutter-door he glanced back, and smiled victoriously at his victim. For long years afterwards, Martin was teased at the prairie camp fires as being both Bear-Baiter and Bear-Biter !

CHAPTER 5

THE RED INDIAN

MARTIN had been weak and sore enough before the adventure in the cave. Now the air seemed to revive his strength. He began to crawl in the direction of the river, finding it easier to travel on all fours rather than to cut his way through the grassy undergrowth.

He kept wondering what other wild animals would be likely to come near, seeking shelter from the threatening snowstorm. His thoughts turned from fear of animals to fear of savage men. Often his father had told him exciting tales of combats between the wandering Red Indian tribes and the pioneers. They were tales of war—bitter, brutal and unrelenting. How far away were the Red Indian tribes now? Martin shuddered.

Crawling in a zig-zag path, Martin emerged on a plateau. He nestled into a sheltering ledge and surveyed the grand sight before him. Far as eye could see there were woods clothing heights, mountains beyond mountains. Nearer lay rich verdure, and Martin searched the grasslands for some sign, however faint, of the Squaw River. He shook his head disconsolately, acknowledging his failure to trace what would have been the most helpful aid to locating his route.

The cold was growing more intense and the evening shadows were lengthening. How cold, how

hungry Martin felt ! Where could he shelter for the night ? That was his most immediate problem. Silently the boy prayed. As though in answer, a loud blast resounded to his right. The firing of a gun denoted the presence of a hunter. Perhaps Barcoll had come, or Dain. Perhaps Jasper, or even Roland himself. Which—oh which ? To avert any mistake Martin called out his own name and cried again—“ Help ! Help ! ”

But there was no answering call and hot tears of disappointment rolled down the boy's face. After what seemed a century of silence another blast resounded, aimed almost directly at the ledge where Martin huddled. The boy cowered against the wall of rock behind him and then decided to move away. His deerskin coat and cap gave him the appearance of an animal and it was possible that from a distance he might be mistaken for a deer or perhaps a young bear.

And then—oh, miracle !—a great tawny dog with liquid, friendly eyes was upon him, sniffing him urgently, pawing him, and licking his face with vociferous rapture. Could this be one of the Marsden's dogs ? Obviously it had been sent to retrieve the hunter's quarry and had found him, Martin. Whose dog could it be ?

Martin's answer came in the form of a tall, lithe figure striding easily towards them. For a moment Martin stood fascinated by the sight of the newcomer and then, as he realised his own danger, his blood ran cold.

In the gathering gloom he could see the stately figure of a Red Indian chief. He was shading his eyes with his hand as he searched the stormy, snow-

THE RED INDIAN

laden sky. He walked with an easy rhythmic movement, his moccasined feet treading noiselessly on the lush grass. Although he was new to the district, Martin knew that the hunter belonged to the war-loving Storr Indians of the westward route.

There was something wildly beautiful in the man's appearance on that stormy evening. He wore a deerskin coat and small cap, with embellishments of blue and of red. Cloth leggings, beautifully embroidered and fringed along their length, covered his supple limbs. In his hand he bore a rifle. A bow was slung over his shoulder. His beautifully studded belt bore his two-bladed knife, his axe, and his quiver. Keeping close beside him was another dog, obviously of the same breed as the one which had found Martin.

Martin feared that worse was now to befall him than when he encountered the bear. The Indian was beside him. In a strange tongue he silenced the barking dog, who now contented himself with sniffing at a decrepit rabbit burrow in the ledge.

The great Indian chief knelt down, ran his hands gently and firmly over Martin's body.

"Are you hurt, little one?" he said.

Martin felt a strange sense of comfort steal over him when the Red Indian addressed him in English. He crawled nearer to the stalwart warrior and explained slowly and clearly all that had happened.

The Storr Indian nodded his head gravely, and stroked the boy's head when he had finished his tale.

"I will do all I can to help you," he said, "but the severe storm at hand will delay your immediate return to your people. But for now you are safe with

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

me." He smiled, revealing beautiful white teeth. "Tonight we must take shelter in the cave," said Seeba.

Martin was reluctant at first to re-enter the cave where the dead bear lay, but Seeba and the dog dragged the carcass over the precipice ledge, hurling it into the leafy depths beneath. In response to Seeba's orders, Martin collected small twigs and prepared a fire. Unloosening his axe from his belt, Seeba cut a gash in several of the trees that lay along their path to help them to direct their footsteps on their return.

The darkness of night was beginning to throw its shadow. Seeba said, "We must shoot while we can yet see"—and, suiting the action to the word, he let fly an arrow which secured itself firmly in the throat of a smallish animal which Martin did not recognise. One of the dogs retrieved the prey, while Martin stood amazed at Seeba's clearness of vision in the fading light.

And thus, sooner than they had intended, the strange couple returned to their cave. Martin was feeling the cold intensely while the Indian seemed indifferent to it as yet. Seeba urged him to run around and race the dogs, Nala and Bort, to keep himself warm. Martin did so, being careful not to wander far away from his new-found friend. When Martin returned, he found that the Indian had built a pyramid of twigs and branches through which the flames of a blazing fire leaped. At the side was an orderly heap of logs placed, like the fire, at the very entrance of the hospitable cave. Within, Seeba had cleared away much of the fallen debris, and Martin now stepped into a thick carpet

THE RED INDIAN

of pine brush which smelt sweetly and felt warm after the icy dampness outside.

Seeba had, with an expert hand, drawn and quartered the animal. Juicy portions of the flesh were wrapped in wet clay, bound with grass, and were now cooking in the heart of the great fire. Nor



The great Indian chief knelt down

were the dogs forgotten. Nala and Bort lay close together, seeking warmth from each other as they gnawed bones.

Martin grew sleepy in the warmth of the fire ; but hunger must be appeased, and soon Seeba woke the lad, who enjoyed the luscious savoury set before him.

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

The great Indian sat in silence. He leaned back against the wall of the cave as he sat upon the ground. He seemed preoccupied with his thoughts as he watched great whiffs of smoke from the beautifully-carved bowl of his long pipe, circle and vanish into the cold air above.

When the meal was over Martin felt very thirsty, but he made no mention of the matter, as it seemed ungrateful after all that Seeba had done for him. But the Indian seemed to have foreknowledge of the boy's needs. At a word from Seeba, Nala and Bort were away, nosing the ground in different directions. Later they returned, their jaws dripping with fresh water. Then Seeba and Martin followed them, groping along the dried up watercourse.

"Listen," said Seeba, and he bent his head intently. "I hear a splash and gurgle. Water is close at hand."

Soon they reached some lichen-covered stones over which a fresh spring bubbled and babbled. The water seemed warm to Martin's tongue and had a very disagreeable after-taste. But he drank readily enough, for he was thirsty, and he laved his face and hands generously, reviving his body and mind with the water's freshness.

As they returned, battling their way against the ever-increasing fall of snow, Seeba explained that they had alighted upon one of the sulphur springs much prevalent in the district. The presence of the sulphur explained the bitter taste which Martin had disliked.

When they were about to re-enter the cave Seeba said gravely : "We are in for several days of heavy snow. We must hope for the best."

CHAPTER 6

THROUGH SNOW-DRIFTS

WHEN Seeba opened the door of the cave early the next morning, Martin and the dogs crowded into the entrance, all eager to see the white world without. All traces of their movements during the previous evening were long since obliterated. It was with difficulty that the dogs were able to guide them to the spring.

They breakfasted as they had supped on the previous evening, the carcase of the animal providing for the two friends and the dogs.

To Martin's intense surprise, Seeba said that they must prepare to journey on. The boy had thought that their wisest course was to remain at the cave until the heavy snow had thawed, but Seeba said that the snow was falling so thick and fast that they would run the danger of being cut off for several days, growing weaker without food and warmth.

So the little party left the cave, the two dogs yelping around as they made their way in a north-westerly direction. The snow was very deep in places and Martin had difficulty in keeping abreast with Seeba. Again and again he plunged into drifts, and again and again did Seeba rescue him. Then the Indian advised the boy to follow in his footsteps and, as Martin acted on this advice, they

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

moved with a marked rapidity. As they journeyed, Martin thought of the page treading in the footsteps of good King Wenceslas, and then began to hum the tune of that delightful Christmas carol.

But gradually it became difficult to follow in Seeba's footsteps and when Martin, despite his most valiant efforts to remain erect, stumbled, Seeba lifted him on to his back. Nala and Bort vied with each other in bounding before them and Martin observed how careful Seeba was to follow the course of the holes in the snow made by the dogs' feet. The dogs apparently knew where they were going and Martin's faith in Seeba was complete. Sometimes, it is true, the dogs seemed to have lost the scent, taking them a long way from the direct course, but, with infinite patience, Seeba retraced his footsteps and with many observations on the way the wind blew and the general lay of the land, he continued on his way.

Martin was already beginning to feel desperately thirsty and hungry. He insisted now on walking again, for they were traversing a wood and the great trees had retained a burden of the snow, sparing the earth beneath. As he continued beside Seeba, Martin saw the dogs hurrying to a round dark spot that lay to their right. Seeba and Martin set their heads in that direction, the snow falling like sharp fragments of glass, full in their faces. The wind blew around them in great eddying gusts. Seeba had been silent for long, but he stopped suddenly and sniffed the wind.

"Ah ! Fire smoke !" he said.

This token of life urged them on. Nala and Bort were lost to sight. Perhaps they had reached human

habitation. The drifts grew higher ; Seeba once again lifted Martin on to his back and plunged on. Then the Indian hesitated, setting the boy down on an old tree-trunk at hand. Vain despair clouded Seeba's face as he peered around the great drifts which surrounded them on every side. Martin shuddered. The dogs were buried by now in the snow. In the hush and silence Martin prayed. His thoughts seemed to have communicated themselves to the Indian, for when he did speak, Seeba said :

"The Good Spirit the white man speaks of guided the lost in days long past. Surely he will guide us, too."

Martin was taken aback by the words so devoutly spoken in that wilderness by the great Indian. Tears sprang to his eyes and when Seeba, searching the boy's face, said : "Will he not?" all that Martin could say was "Yes."

And then, as though by direct guidance, Seeba fell. He stumbled into the snow and was buried deep in a drift. Martin lost sight of him for he himself was falling, quickly—through the roof of a little hut buried deep beneath the drift ! For a brief moment Martin seemed to realise that he was falling through a chimney, and then he was crawling all fours on a dry warm floor. Seeba had descended more gracefully, slithering down the main pole of the Indian hut into which they had so fortunately stumbled.

But was it fortunate ? For several moments Seeba stood, still and tense. A woman's voice shrilled near him, speaking the musical dialect of the Borlor Indians, sworn enemies of the Storrs.

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

Martin was leaning against a wall of the hut, overcome with coughing caused by the smoke of the open fire.

A few moments later he could discern through the smoke, the silhouettes of Seeba and an old squaw in animated conversation. He could not understand their words, but it was obvious that Seeba was trying to comfort the old creature, and he must have succeeded for the old woman presently urged Martin and Seeba to seat themselves on the logs beside her fire.

While the old squaw busied herself to provide for their greater comfort, Seeba told Martin in a few words the old woman's tale. Overcome by her age and growing weakness, she had fallen behind her wandering tribe and too exhausted to travel further had built the hut. Perchance, in the spring, she would travel down by river and rejoin her people. Seeba took Martin on a tour of inspection and showed that the hut was little but a heap of hastily piled stones. In one corner was the stock of firewood for the winter ; in another was the old squaw's rapidly diminishing store of food. Seeba frowned gravely when he saw how little the old woman had left to provide herself with food for the remaining months. Two hungry guests would make deep inroads on the scant supply.

Returning to the fireplace they found that the squaw had filled the kettle with great lumps of snow. She questioned Seeba hospitably enough as to what he and the little white man would eat in her hut. Seeba answering, spoke more to himself than to the others.

"I would that we could have brought our own

THROUGH SNOW-DRIFTS

food. Sea-Gull the squaw has so little left for herself."

He turned to Martin suddenly. "Will you give us your beaver gloves?" he said.

"Willingly, Seeba," was the ready answer. Then



The squaw's utensils were few and crude

to Martin's consternation Seeba and the squaw prepared the gloves for boiling in the kettle. Bidding Martin remain where he was, Seeba said he would venture out to look for the dogs. Almost immediately he returned with a great bird rather like an owl under his arm, while Nala and Bort limped joyously beside him.

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

With great dexterity, Sea-Gull prepared the dead bird for cooking. Soon the little hut was filled with the appetising smell of the glove broth and the roasting game. The squaw's utensils were few and crude, and the diners had to share in turn, but the meal was one of the most appetising of which Martin ever partook.

When the meal was over, the three sat sleepily beside the fire, wholly unconscious of the stifling atmosphere of the small hut.

Sea-Gull questioned Seeba concerning Martin, the Indian interpreting her speech for the boy's benefit. She asked the boy's name and when Seeba said—"Martin," she looked on the ground, puzzled. Martin saw her perplexity over the strange word and then, remembering Jasper's name for him, he told Seeba to tell her that his other name was "Stormy Petrel."

At this piece of information, the old squaw sat up and talked in an excited voice. Seeba explained that the wandering Borlor Indians regarded the Stormy Petrel as their special bird of good fortune.

The old squaw crossed the hut and sat beside the boy, stroking his hair with her gnarled hand. On his entry, Martin had thought she was the ugliest old woman he had ever seen, but now at nearer vision he could see that the old squaw retained much of the striking beauty of her early days. True, her face was now wrinkled with age, but the expression of her coal-black eyes was loving and kind, and an atmosphere of benevolence seemed to surround her like a halo. Her dress was drab and worn but her leggings were beautifully worked, revealing even to Martin's eyes that the squaw had belonged

THROUGH SNOW-DRIFTS

to a position of importance among the Borlor Indians.

As they sat before the fire Seeba questioned the old woman minutely. Martin following their gestures surmised that Seeba was gathering valuable information concerning their way. He was soon too drowsy to follow their conversation further and thereupon wrapped himself up in the blanket which Sea-Gull had given him and was soon fast asleep.

He was wakened in the early dawn by Seeba. The Indian was up, dressed to continue his journey. From the sleet glistening on his coat and cap, it was obvious that he had been out already to ascertain the state of the weather.

"Martin," said Seeba. "Last night I questioned the old squaw carefully. She spoke the truth, for her words have guided me this morning to a small stream which links on to what the white man calls the Squaw River. Where the two join she tells me there is a small canoe hidden in the trunk of a decaying oak. It is my purpose to reach the place quickly. I shall reach a settlement of my tribe near the Squaw River. They shall bring supplies to you here. I myself will go on and direct the people of Marsden's Range to you here."

"But Seeba—Seeba—why not take me with you?" faltered Martin, anxious not to be left buried in the hut with the old Sea-Gull away from all humanity for he knew not how long.

"Little one, you must trust me," said Seeba gravely. "I have much to do for others, too. The winter storms have come upon us earlier this year and there are many that I must help. Here you will be safe, and in a few days my people will be

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

here, and a few days later your own people will reach you."

There was nothing that Martin could say to gain-say Seeba's resolve. The Indian knew best, he thought. He hid the tears of disappointment and waved bravely as he watched Seeba set off in the cold dawn making for the stream. Bort he had taken with him, but he had left Nala as companion to Martin. When Seeba's lithe figure had disappeared behind the furthest pine, Martin felt very lonely. But the sight of the squaw collecting snow for the kettle restored his spirits. The old lady needed his help and companionship and Martin now gave them willingly.

CHAPTER 7

THE YOUNG HUNTER

MARTIN thought that their breakfast was to consist of a soup similar to that which they had had for supper on the previous evening. By signs Sea-Gull showed that she wished the boy to remain to attend to the fire and watch the kettle as it boiled. She herself had disappeared through the entrance of the hut, apparently setting forth on a predetermined mission. Meanwhile, Martin cajoled Nala and sent him out into the snow, hoping that he would return bearing some bird or animal which had perished with the cold.

How the boy wished he knew more about trapping! Then he reflected ruefully how short a time he had been at Marsden's Range before he had lunged on the long trail that had brought him to the squaw's hut. The boy's eyes lit up as he recalled the adventures that had befallen, and then he grew sad thinking that it would be many days before his rescuers would reach him. What—oh what, if they should come too late?

To banish morbid thoughts he went to the entrance of the hut. The squaw had been busy digging for mosses under the snow, and had collected a goodly pile which she was now bearing towards the hut. Martin scanned the horizon in each direction, hoping vainly that he might see Roland or Jasper or Barcoll or perhaps Seeba himself.

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

The mosses tasted truly delicious to the hungry boy and he tried to communicate his thanks to the squaw. Later that morning Martin was busy repairing the hut and making it habitable. Sea-Gull, who had smoked her pipe and gone to sleep before her fire, woke to find that Martin had done much to make her dwelling secure from future storms. She was overcome, accustomed as she was to have to work herself while her man rested in the house after his day's hunting. She endeavoured to speak to Martin by drawing on the earth floor of the hut. In this she was very successful. Clearly Martin understood the signs as she drew bows and arrows and then various traps for snaring birds and beasts.

The cold was now far less intense. Martin wandered out and with the aid of his knife cut himself a bow and some arrows. But the bow was useless without its string. He returned disconsolately to the hut and laid them in the squaw's lap. She examined them approvingly and with enthusiasm rose and went out, returning with the long, fibrous roots of a strange plant which she wove into a fine, resilient rope. Martin marvelled at her ingenuity and watched her as she strung the bow.

She showed her eagerness to send him out hunting by giving Martin a gentle push into the open. She then rushed after him, draping a blanket over his shoulders and pointing towards the direction of the stream. Could she mean that the prey was more likely to congregate near the stream? Or perhaps she meant that he could fish for food if he failed to shoot. Martin whistled Nala to his side. Of one thing the boy was very certain. On the success of

THE YOUNG HUNTER

this hunting expedition depended the lives of Sea-Gull and himself.

The keen air sharpened the boy's appetite. Oh, he must find some food before he returned. He felt he could not face the disappointment in the old squaw's eyes if he returned empty-handed. But he was handicapped as he was so amateur a hunter, and to make matters worse, all the living things in the neighbourhood seemed to have buried themselves for warmth and safety in the snow.

Nala had alighted on a dead squirrel and it was with some reluctance that Martin saw the dog devour the carcass. He did not begrudge the dog its find, only it seemed then that while the animal's hunger was satisfied, its master would have to journey on without food.

Martin realised that many of the animals had already tucked themselves away for the winter's sleep. But Sea-Gull had pointed determinedly to the direction in which he was walking, so she must have some knowledge of the animals that frequented it.

Nala was now splashing on the edge of a pool round which tall rushes bent and shivered. When Martin reached the water he found it fringed with ice. The boy gathered some of the succulent mosses that the squaw had brought into the hut for breakfast. At least he would not return empty-handed, but he abandoned the gathering and stared fascinated at a great silver-grey fish imprisoned in the ice-water. Here was luck ! With the haft of his knife he carefully broke the ice and wedged the fish out of its prison. And then he saw another fish similarly imprisoned twice his arm's length away.

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

He had to tread gingerly on the ice to reach it. This he did successfully, balancing himself on the slippery surface, and then tied the two fishes up in a corner of his blanket.

When he ascended the bank he found Nala scraping at an old tree trunk. Perhaps there is another squirrel, thought Martin. This time Nala must learn to share. He called the dog aside but Nala was very loth to leave his haunt. When Martin put his hand into the dark depths of the old trunk, he realised that Nala had alighted upon the nest of some bird of prey, for here were clustered in happy confusion two wild ducks, some small creatures resembling moles, save that their skins were of a dazzling whiteness, and about half a dozen mice. Remembering the partiality of owls for the latter he looked around cautiously to see whether the bird whose haunt he was robbing was in sight.

What he saw made him drop his booty. Coming from the pine wood scarce sixty feet from him in single file was a band of about seventy Indian warriors ! Two chieftains headed the cavalcade, the bright plumage of their head-dress scintillating in the sunshine. They were armed with bows and guns, poles and great scalping-knives. Could these be the men whom Seeba had sent from the Indian settlement along the river ? They had travelled quickly, and were obviously making for the squaw's hut as though they were aware of its exact position.

Martin was about to rush out to greet them, but some unseen power seemed to restrain him and, with a wisdom of his own, he sank down into the hollow tree-trunk, drawing Nala with him, nuzzling the dog's snout as he did so. Through a crevice in

THE YOUNG HUNTER

the trunk Martin saw the strange retinue that followed the warriors. There was much baggage piled high on the backs of ponies, and darting among the animals was a weird medley of squaws and children. Some of the ponies were attached to a primitive



In single file was a band of about seventy Indian warriors

kind of drag cart, which slid with ease on the snowy surface of the ground. Later Martin was to learn that the band was on its way to one of the neighbouring forts of the French traders, to exchange their supplies of furs and skins and pemmican for blankets and such foodstuffs as the Indians could not obtain. Some inner knowledge came to Martin

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

that he had done well to hide ; for though they traded with the white man the Borlor Indians had no love for him, and resented in particular the presence of anyone who they thought might be spying and trespassing on their territory.

Martin turned on his side in his hiding hole and saw that they were making a temporary encampment near the squaw's hut. Should he come out and declare himself, trusting to their mercy ? The problem occupied Martin for some time. But if Sea-Gull wanted him, she knew the direction he had taken and could either come for him herself or send the warriors to search for him.

Sea-Gull seemed to be quite indifferent to him. Had she forgotten him in her delight in welcoming this branch of her tribe ? Martin crept out of his hole and crawled behind a bush, getting a better view of the camp fire and the figures moving around it. He kept Nala close to his heels and forgot his hunger and discomfort in his interest of the proceedings.

His patience was rewarded at length. Disguising her path by frequent side turns and meanderings, Sea-Gull made her way towards the pool. Realising the object of her search, Martin hurried forth to meet her. Even more hurriedly, Sea-Gull drew him back into the shadow of the sheltering bush. With a sturdy twig she drew in the snow and Martin peered on to the ground to see the object of her message. First, she drew the hut with the camp fire and the gesticulating figures beside it. Then, very determinedly, she drew two strokes obliterating the scene. Then she drew the cavalcade moving away. She emphasised the direction by pointing

THE YOUNG HUNTER

arrows. She searched Martin's face wondering whether he understood. Martin nodded. Then she drew the hut again, drawing the figure of the boy and of the dog beside it. Again Martin nodded, keeping back the fear of the terrible loneliness that assailed him. Then the old squaw stroked his hair, hastened back to the hut, endeavouring once more to hide her mission.

Martin remained in hiding. He knew now that he would have to remain in the hut alone. As soon as the young moon was climbing the heavens the Indians struck camp, moving away in the direction that Sea-Gull had indicated. Very slowly, Martin made his way back to the deserted hut. There was deep comfort in the presence of Nala, but how long would it be before his rescuers would come—how long?

CHAPTER 8

THE WITCH POOL

To quell his sense of loneliness Martin began to count his blessings. He had food. He had shelter. He was in comparative safety. He had Nala for company and help was on its way. In a more cheerful frame of mind, he entered the hut to find that the squaw had left him her blankets and her deer-skin cloak. There were also savoury morsels of pemmican left by the Indians, and he had his own supply of food from his own expedition.

Martin heaped up the fire, cooked his supper with an ease which was surprising to him, and then calling Nala within the hut, wrapped himself in the blankets and slept soundly till the next day's sun was well overhead.

Freshened by his sound sleep Martin, having partaken of some of the food, went out to explore. He determined not to go far from the hut lest Roland or the others should come and, finding the hut deserted, return without him.

The day was surprisingly warm, although the snow lay around in great drifts. Exploring beyond the pool Martin saw that the bed of the stream was composed of many different levels, forming enormous steps.

Turning a sharp bend in the river he reached some waterfalls. The dull sound of the falling water frightened the dog and Nala made off in another

THE WITCH POOL

direction, leaving Martin to explore the river alone. The boy saw that the river tumbled over two falls in a clear sheet of water and then whirled and eddied into a pool, which he named the Witch's Cauldron.

The Witch Pool, where he had caught the fish, now gleamed like a silver shield as it scintillated in the sunshine and reflected the surrounding snow. To get a better view, Martin went to the edge of the platform and looked down. The water tumbled over the first fall through a narrow neck of rock. The dancing waters of the fall mesmerised Martin where he stood. He stepped nearer to the edge of the pool. He balanced himself, catching hold of the spruce sapling that grew on the extreme edge, and peered down into the well of the gulf. As he gazed he wondered whether any birds had made their home in the cliff.

Martin was standing on the bole of the tree. The next moment he was whirling through space. Heaven and earth, water and space seemed to whizz past him. He came to earth senseless and yet conscious. And then life seemed to cease to exist . . .

When Martin regained consciousness, a thick darkness seemed to envelop him ; then he was dimly conscious of a white mist, and through that mist two fireballs seemed to burn their way towards him. And then he fell back in a semi-conscious state. When he became conscious again, he saw that the white mist that puzzled him earlier was the flash and spray of the falling water.

He made an effort to stand, but his limbs were so severely shaken that he could only crawl to the water's edge to quench his thirst. The distance was short, but the journey was slow. He crept close to

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

the cauldron, the cool waters swirling against the gravel on which he lay.

The water refreshed Martin. He sat up. Then to his intense astonishment, a great, grey cat came out of the water. In its mouth was a trout.

The cat came towards the dry shingle. It shook itself as though it were a dog. It was about to leap forward when it saw Martin. The boy expected it to attack, but the cat merely stayed where it was, staring at Martin without blinking.

"Puss ! Puss !" called Martin, coaxingly. At that moment a great cloud seemed to descend over the cavity. The sound of fanning wings descended. Martin jerked himself on to his knees. The cat sprang directly into the boy's arms and the next moment a great, grey-winged hawk brushed the place where it had stood. The great bird swooped over the cauldron and disappeared below the lower fall.

Assured of her safety the cat leaped away from Martin and went back to the pool, nosing her way like an otter. Martin watched the spot where she had disappeared and followed the ascending bubbles that told of her progress. In a very short time she appeared with another fish, retreated to the farthest corner of the gravel, and began her meal.

Weak and shaken, Martin tried to stand. He found that his right ankle had received a severe wrench. His first concern was to return. He limped over the gravel, surveying the smooth walls of the pit where he lay. A cold sweat of terror and weakness broke over him. He was shut in.

The boy explored on every side. There was no way down the lower fall, none up the higher. He was trapped ! He crept round the rock again.

THE WITCH POOL

There was no foothold that would have availed a cat. It came upon him in a flash why the wild cat had taken to fishing. The cat, too, had fallen into the cauldron and was a prisoner also.

Martin began to shout, but he soon realised the uselessness of this. The pool was more remote than the squaw's hut. Would his rescuers think of searching for him here? He called for Nala, but the roar of the waterfall drowned the sound of his voice.

Fire and smoke were the alternative to shouting. Martin knew something now of Indian smoke signals. So he built a fire and struck a light with the help of his nailed boot and a dry stone. As he fanned the flames into life, Martin realised that the well was too deep for his purpose to be effective. The smoke would disperse long before it reached through the bush and tree growths.

Over the fire he thought of food. The fish which the cat had dropped when the hawk swooped down lay upon the shingle. Martin cooked it. The fire warmed him and filled him with fresh hope. He ate the fish, knowing full well the strength food supplies in such emergencies.

Several times Martin tried to scale the cliffs without any success. He crawled to the shelter of the overhanging rock and made a bed of spruce fans. He now saw that the cat had made this cavity its home. It seemed to resent Martin's coming and in spite of his coaxing refused to come near him.

He dozed feverishly throughout the afternoon. Once the touch of a rough tongue awakened him. It was the wild cat licking the spray from his hand. The wild cat now remained nearer to the boy and seemed to watch his movements nervously.

CHAPTER 9

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

A STONE crashed down from the platform above. It missed the cat narrowly and rebounded into the stream. The startled cat made a direct leap towards Martin, but Martin was far too excited to notice this gesture of confidence. He shouted and shouted until he was hoarse. At the same time he heaped damp branches upon the fire to raise a smoke. His disappointment was intense when there was no response from overhead. The stone had not been thrown by Roland after all—nor by Jasper—nor Seeba—nor by any human. Martin now concluded that the stone had in all probability been loosened when he dislodged the spruce sapling. It was only then that it had broken free entirely.

To occupy his mind, Martin determined to follow the cat's example and forage for himself. The water was icy cold but he waded into its black depths and groped among the submerged rocks, but caught nothing. There was some comfort in the fact that his ankle was now sufficiently strong for him to stand upright and limp around.

Sleet began to fall. A series of storm clouds drove over from the west. This was a bad sign. The sleet thickened. Martin was forced to seek shelter in the cavity. The cat hid in the farthest recess. It was now quite indifferent to Martin's presence.

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

A fork of lightning shot athwart the rock and a deafening peal of thunder echoed among the cliffs. The rainstorm thickened and with each peal the volume of water increased.

Darkness fell quickly and a long night of horror followed. The thunder wandered away over the hills, but the rain did not abate. Martin crept into his spruce bed and lay there, grateful for the sheltering lee of the great rock.

When morning came the light was grey and troubled. The rain still fell, lashed by a rising west wind. Martin bethought him of the snow-drifts being swirled into the stream, flooding it. The river flowed in such a spate that it swirled over the floor of his resting place and the yeasty flood frothed and lapped at his feet. To remain there meant being swept over the lower falls. But where could he turn?

His peril lent him strength. The cat crept towards him, crying piteously. It had not been afraid of the water in its ordinary condition, but the terrific flood frightened it. Martin picked it up. It nestled against him without resistance. The boy stumbled out on to a heap of still dry gravel.

The water gouged its way over the falls, and swirled in a frothy torrent over the second cliff. A young pine tree undermined and uprooted was whirled over the first fall. Its fall drove Martin deeper into the black water. He stumbled into the dragging current and the cat leaped from his arms.

Martin searched the torrent expecting to see it borne to its death ; but the cat was not to be seen. He looked up. The pine tree had upreared itself in the flood and the cat was springing from its top into

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

a hazel bush that hung from the top of the first wall of rock. Again the cat had shown him the way to life.

The flood was rising. Martin clambered up the tree, regardless of his weak ankle and torn flesh. The trunk swayed violently. Upward he went with the skill of desperation. With a wild effort, he jumped for the hazel bush. The pine rolled away and went hurtling over the second fall. The hazel bush saved him. It was strong and bore the weight of his body. He hauled himself over the hazel branches hand over hand. Again and again he felt an impulse to let himself go. Only the most desperate effort of will sustained him.

He gained a foothold, but he had still a dangerous climb before he reached a place of safety. With a superhuman effort he climbed slowly over the lip of the fall and dragged himself on to the edge of the platform. There he lay exhausted. Then a rough tongue licked his hand. The wild cat was calling him back to life. The sun shone.

Faint and weak, Martin made his way back slowly to the squaw's hut. Nala ran out to greet him barking loudly, and raising the echoes of the farthest distances. It was obvious that the dog was not hungry for the carcasses of birds and animals lay beside the entrance of the hut.

Martin was grateful for the small supply of food that remained in the hut and was thankful that he had hunted on the previous day, thus saving the squaw's small store for this emergency. Preparing the food was a painful process, but after the meal and a long rest he felt himself once more. Scanning the sky, he saw that the rainstorm of the night had

cleared to give place to a return of the snow clouds.

Martin saw that he must act quickly. There seemed to be little hope of the arrival of his rescuers. Seeba had told him to remain with the squaw, it is true, but the squaw had gone. The long silences and extreme loneliness were beginning to grate harshly on the boy's nerves. Martin balanced his thoughts this way and that. Finally, calling Nala to him, he determined to set out immediately. He came out of the hut and started off in the direction that the squaw and the Borlor Indians had taken.

The sleet seemed to increase with each step that he took. The light faded quickly and very early that afternoon. His decision once made, Martin determined that there must be no turning back. Onward he went, his figure growing whiter and whiter so that, had there been a passer-by, he might have taken Martin for a snow-man. Nala's russet coat was powdered with snow-flakes. Occasionally they stopped. The boy rubbed his numb fingers and removed the icicles that formed between the dog's toes, and which cut into the flesh, causing it to bleed profusely.

The moon rose early as it had done on the previous night. Their shadows bobbed and nodded among the dark columns of stately pines. Martin was anxious to hasten through the forest land, for at ever-increasing intervals he could hear the call of wild animals, and the wolf howl was the most dominant sound of all. The icy night was lit up by the northern lights flashing overhead. The whole setting of the journey was so weird and terrifying that even an Indian, accustomed to the route, might have quailed, fearing to traverse it alone.

Fears crowded around Martin, but he tried not to think too far ahead. Ever and anon they passed the remains of wood fires. Martin grew more confident at the sight of each. The charred piles told him that he was following closely in the track of the Borlor Indians. He knew that with their trucks and baggage they were making for one of the trading forts, the name of which he had yet to learn.

Nala's constant barking seemed to foretell that the camp was at hand. Martin moved more cautiously now, anxious that the Indians should not suspect his whereabouts. He could see the glow of a camp fire, and was sorely tempted to risk everything and join the tribe, sharing their shelter and comfort. Discretion, however, urged him to leave the direct trail and plunge deeper and deeper into the dark forest. He wandered on, scarce seeing his way, though the crystal snow revealed to him his more immediate path.

In the faint grey light of the dawn, he climbed a great mound, hoping thereby to gain some knowledge of the Indian encampment. A steady column of smoke rose to his left, seeming to indicate the place where the Borlors had settled. Martin determined to remain where he was. Later in the day, when the tribe had moved on, he would go to the deserted camp site, revive the fires and gather the remains of the food left. He sought a hollow tree-trunk as a shelter, and in doing so he found that the trunks of several tall pines had been hacked by a woodman's axe in the manner he had seen Seeba mark the trees outside the bear's cave. Could this mound be the meeting-place of hunters?

As the light strengthened, Martin saw that the

FOLLOWING THE TRAIL

column of smoke he had seen in the early dawn was coming, not from a camp fire, but from a solid chimney. He had alighted on a trader's house. Tears of joy ran down his cheeks as he saw, nestling some half-mile away, a well-built trading fort. Safety lay at hand !

CHAPTER 10

TRADERS' GATE

IN response to a brief word of command, Nala was at Martin's feet. Together they would trudge into the friendly fort. Martin was preparing for the final stage of the journey when a rasping sound close at hand made him look around sharply. To his intense dismay, he saw a party of Borlor Indians stride forth towards the mound. In a flash it came to him. This tribe, under pretence of trade, was hostile to the white man of the fort. Now it was that he understood the squaw's anxiety concerning his safety. He cowered in the tree-trunk, wondering what was the best thing to do.

Another group of Indians came out from the camp and joined the first party, posting themselves in among some stunted trees. Martin watched their movements carefully as they prepared for an attack on the small fort.

The chief and a small band of warriors, followed by a group of squaws bowed double under their burden of skins, were advancing over a little wooden bridge towards the stockade. The chief bore in his hands a great branch covered with leaves, a sign that he had come in peace, eager to trade. The people of the fort were roused by the clanging of a great bell. In a few moments the fort was a scene of bustle and activity. The traders were removing

TRADERS' GATE

their defences, eager to trade with the wild men at their gate. Martin could see that the men in ambush were preparing for attack. How he longed to give warning to the men in the fort ! Yet he seemed powerless to do so. He dared not come out of the tree trunk, lest the men hiding in the bushes should see him.

One glance at the main entrance of the fort showed that the chief officer had come out to speak to the chief of the tribe. The men in ambush, though out of hearing distance, were intent on the proceedings.

"Now or never," said Martin to himself. He feared to leave the dog behind, yet feared to take him with him. He considered a moment and decided that if matters came to the worst, it were better that they should be together.

Martin seated himself on the ground and rapidly slid down the mound. Cautiously, yet quickly, he crept round to the back of the fort. To his joy he found a gate. He knocked as loudly as he dared. His fear was that the traders had gathered at the other gate and that here there was no one to open. He knocked again, this time louder.

The gate was opened slowly. To Martin's astonishment a girl, slightly younger than himself, peeped out.

"What is it ? What is it ?" she said, seeming to sense the urgency of his presence.

"Let me come in and I will tell you," answered Martin, breathlessly. "It is urgent. It cannot wait."

The girl stretched out her hand and drew Martin in, the dog following closely at his heels.

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

"I must speak to the chief officer," said Martin.

"He is my father," said the girl. "Give me the message."

"Tell him," said Martin, "that the Borlor Indians lie in ambush on the mound while the chief trades with him."

"Is that true?" questioned the girl, searching his face as though she would have been glad to find that the boy had imagined the sight.

"Do not be afraid, Nathalie," said a boy who had come up to them. "We can withstand their attack without loss of life. But run to the fore gate. Call father aside and give him the message."

When the girl had run to the fore gate, the boy, who was a little older than Martin, took him by the arm and led him past the houses towards an entry where they could view the proceedings between the trading officers and the savages.

"I am Ralph," said the boy. "My father, Captain Ferguson, is in charge of this fort, Traders' Gate. Look! Look!" he said hurriedly. "Nathalie is a wise girl. She has pretended to take father his pipe and tobacco, and under cover of the action is telling him the message."

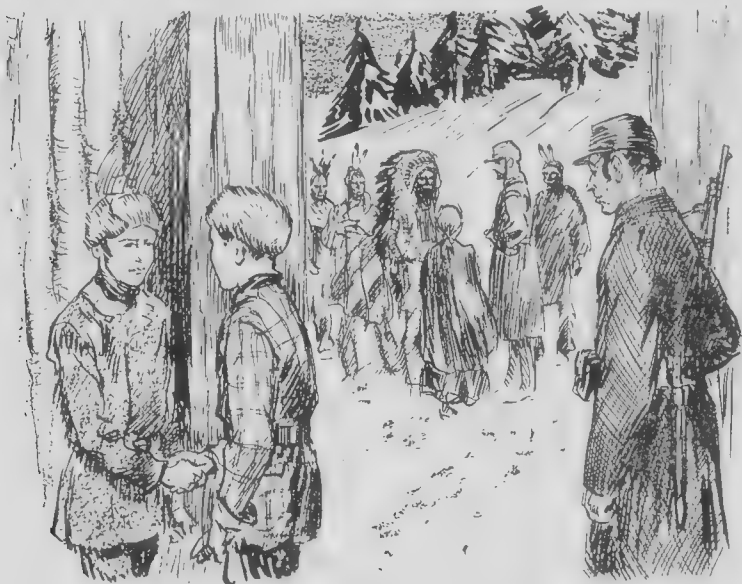
The Borlors were standing around their pile of skins gesticulating wildly and seeking entry within the gate. Captain Ferguson remained calm on receiving the message, but communicated it to two of his leading men.

He made but one deviation from his usual course. In allowing the Indians to trade within the fort he ordered that they should enter in small groups only. He stationed men outside to control the remaining Borlors demanding entry.

TRADERS' GATE

"Come with me," said Ralph. He led Martin into the fort store.

The shop was a long, high-ceilinged room. A great counter ran along one length, protected at one end by a high grille. Goods—packed food-stuffs,



"I am Ralph," said the boy

blankets, fire-arms—were arrayed on the shelves, but the Red Indians were attracted first to the gaily-coloured kerchiefs and trinkets that were arranged on a stand to the side.

Like children at a kindergarten, they crowded around and played with the scales on the counter. The iron stove with its comforting warmth also

fascinated them. There was much laughing and talking, but when it came to exchanging the skins for the goods, seriousness crept into their lynx-like eyes, and the Borlors showed that they had a mind not to be cheated.

While the first section of the party was inspecting the store, Martin told Ralph the brief outline of his own story, and explained why he was particularly anxious that an old squaw attached to the Borlors should not come to any harm. Ralph nodded his understanding. Anxiously the boys watched the patch of frozen reeds, but all was quiet. Then, suddenly, an Indian called Wolfskin assumed the leadership of the younger men who had come to purchase.

"The white man gives too little for our skins," he said. "It is for us to take what we can get."

He uttered a wild cry and an answering whoop came through the frozen air. The frozen reeds were trampled underfoot as the dusky Indians ran to Traders' Gate.

"Quick ! Quick !" said Ralph. "There's not a moment to lose. You must help all you can, Martin, for there are but six men in the fort and what are they against all these hostile Indians ?"

Martin declared his eagerness to help, urging Ralph to tell him what to do.

"This way ! This way !" said Ralph, and Martin, anxious to render immediate help, stumbled after him to the back of the store.

It seemed as though Ralph was used to these emergencies. He unlocked a door and when they had entered, unlocked another, whereupon the boys stumbled into a room the windows of which were

TRADERS' GATE

shuttered. But Ralph was familiar with the room and Martin for his part did his utmost to assist in barricading it.

The two doors were locked and iron bars were placed in sockets attached to the doors. The clamour outside stressed the urgency of the defence and hastened the boys' actions.

"Father will do all he can to save the store," said Ralph. "We must defend the store-room."

Ralph climbed to one of the shutters.

"Rilla ! Rilla !" he called. "Rilla, barricade the house."

An Indian servant gave a cry of understanding and hastened towards the dwelling-house.

The sound of hatchet-heads hammered on the door.

"We must hope for the best," said Ralph, "and trust they have no fire-arms."

The hammering continued and the sharp edges of the axes were already penetrating when someone cried out : "The Storrs—the Storr Indians are here !"

Who it was started the cry the boys were never to know, though Ralph always declared afterwards that Rilla was responsible. But Rilla, perhaps as a measure of self-defence, never admitted that he was responsible for the manœuvre.

New though he was to the Indian trail, Martin was aware that deep enmity existed between the Borlors and the Storrs. He was now to learn that that enmity was sufficiently deep to make the Borlors leave the white man, and forsake the booty, to rush out of Traders' Gate to attack the Storrs. Captain Ferguson had a theory that the Borlors

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

were afraid of being entrapped within the Traders' Gate and that they hastened out of the fort to attack the Storrs in open country.

When the boys emerged from the store-room they found provisions and stores in dishevelled heaps throughout the fort, and here and there were bundles of skins and loads of pemmican. Beyond the stream the Borlors were hastening away in pell-mell frenzy while the patient squaws and the clamouring children plodded after them. As he watched, Martin wondered whether the old squaw was in their midst and whether Seeba would meet her.

I

CHAPTER 11

FRIENDLY ENEMIES

“WELCOME to our home,” said Captain Ferguson as he clapped Martin heartily on the back. “You’ve certainly had a rousing welcome to Traders’ Gate, my lad, but it could be worse.” Captain Ferguson chuckled, for the Borlors had left behind far more than they had taken or disarrayed. “A sound meal first, and then a short rest. After that we will sit around and you, Martin, shall tell us about yourself. We owe you much, my boy.”

After the sound meal Martin was taken to Ralph’s room to rest. There he fell into a deep sleep and did not waken till late in the afternoon. When he joined the family, Nathalie greeted him.

“You must have been more tired than your dog. Martin, for Nala has been running all over the fort this last half-hour.”

In reply to Captain Ferguson, Martin explained how he had reached Traders’ Gate. Captain Ferguson said that he felt that Martin’s people must be very anxious about him.

“Marsden’s Range,” murmured Captain Ferguson, as he puffed at his glowing pipe. “You have come a long way. The difficulty is to get you back.”

“Good !” cried Ralph. “Martin will have to stay with us till the spring.”

“If you had come a few weeks earlier,” said

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

Captain Ferguson, "I could have sent you back by one of the Company's boats to Wolfstone. In the summer months our men are always rowing up and down the Squaw River, but once autumn sets in they refuse to go, and now, of course, it is out of the question to travel in that way. And now, while the Indians are so unsettled, it is well for us to remain within the fort. But do not worry, Martin, you are welcome here and we will get you home at the earliest opportunity."

When Martin learnt that Ralph had not been to school, he was eager to tell him of his own experiences in school at Montreal. Martin found that Ralph and Nathalie had learnt much under the guidance of their father. He told his new companions of his pleasure at being at school and of his progress there. Then Martin grew wistful remembering the sad events that had occasioned his removal from Montreal. Captain Ferguson sensed the boy's sorrow and said something hurriedly.

"Bring the stools to the fireside. We will have another log on the fire, Nathalie. Now, my young folk, I will tell you the tale of an encounter with Dodanar Indians near Withered Oaks Valley."

And so the evening wore on. When Martin left the cosy warmth of the living-room to share a bedroom with Ralph, he turned to Captain Ferguson and though too moved to speak much, thanked him for his hospitality. But Captain Ferguson silenced him. "No more, lad. I know your gratitude. Rest content. You are among friends."

The days which followed were a strange miscellany of happiness and fear. There was ever present the fear that the Borlors would return with renewed

FRIENDLY ENEMIES

force and attack the trading post. Interspersed with this anxiety, however, were interludes of merriment and adventure wherein Martin was initiated into the life of Traders' Gate.

The men of the fort were anxious to repair the defences immediately and the help of the boys was requisitioned in the work.

The fort was beginning to assume its original appearance when a messenger hailed Captain Ferguson from the outer gate. Martin became apprehensive when he saw that the messenger was a Borlor. Was he the herald of another attack? Ralph set his fears at rest when he said: "The messenger comes in peace. See how his spear is tied with grass. He does not come to fight."

The boys soon discovered the outcome of the conversation between the Indian and the Captain. Their excitement grew when they learnt that Captain Ferguson intended to accompany the Borlor back to the camp. One or two of the men were hesitant, seeking to dissuade the Captain from his plan.

"We must risk it, my men," was Captain Ferguson's answer. "I think the Borlors will respond to kindness."

"Well, sir, if you are going, I am coming with you," said Peter Trant, the foreman.

"Thank you, Peter," said Captain Ferguson. "You may come, though I do not think there is any real danger."

Preparations were made to travel to the Borlor camp by sledge over the snow. When the messenger intervened, speaking by signs and gestures, Captain Ferguson nodded his understanding. The

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

Indian camp was at hand, separated from the fort by the river estuary.

The expedition was re-planned. Peter Trant was to accompany the Captain, who now gave permission for the two boys to come. The joy of the lads was boundless and it was with extreme difficulty that they balanced themselves upright to help to carry the stores which the Captain had ordered to be taken to the Indian camp.

The little party crossed the river in the Indian's canoe. Martin marvelled at the dexterity of the Borlor in manœuvring it among the rapids. They reached the other side in safety and set off northwards in accordance with the messenger's directions.

A short journey brought them within sight of the camp. Clouds of smoke rose and mingled from the many wigwam fires. Stillness hung over the camp for it was as yet early morning. Peter Trant explained that the men and the dogs were sleeping. Some of the squaws were astir, gathering firewood and filling their kettles with snow. Occasionally Martin caught sight of a papoose in its wooden cradle strapped to the back of a squaw as she pursued her way over the snow, intent upon her work.

Captain Ferguson and his party were ushered into a central dwelling, greater in size than those around, the lodge of the Indian chief, Deerfoot.

Martin was entranced by the beauty and ingeniousness of the Indian dwelling. While Captain Ferguson and Deerfoot conversed, Martin and Ralph explored the wigwam. The floor space was some eight feet in diameter and around a dozen or so of sturdy poles were wedged into the ground. These poles met together at the top and were tied

FRIENDLY ENEMIES

together in a fantastic fashion. Buffalo skins were fastened over the poles, and these skins were ornamented with gay scenes of warriors and wild animals. The lodge of the chief appeared to be more elaborate than those of his subjects and was distinguishable by its bright colours of orange and black and scarlet and blue, whereas the neighbouring wigwams were of russet brown.

Deerfoot appeared to be less concerned with just dealing in trade than with his own bodily ailments. The Spirit of the Squaw River had visited him, he declared, and it was the Spirit that had prevailed upon him to send the messenger to bring back Captain Ferguson and his medicine bag. The good Captain had listened patiently to the long preamble and was now all eagerness, questioning the chief concerning his pain. The enmity of the affray was forgotten in his anxiety to minister to the ailing chief. Captain Ferguson was strengthened in his belief that it was the younger men of the tribe who had urged the attack on Traders' Gate contrary to the wishes of their old chief. Before he left the camp, Captain Ferguson had ample evidence to know that what he had surmised was right.

While Captain Ferguson attended to the bodily needs of Deerfoot, Martin and Ralph continued their tour of inspection. Outside the lodge walls were, fastened in orderly array, shields and bows and spears. Within the lodge, safe and dry, rifles were stored. A group of children had gathered around the chief's lodge while others, their curiosity concerning the white-skinned man being satisfied, had returned to their play or were teasing the numerous dogs meandering through the camp.

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

The messenger who had brought them to the camp stood at the entrance of the chief's wigwam. He seemed to be anxious that the boys should not wander far from Deerfoot's dwelling. He beckoned to them, raised the fur curtain of the entrance, and the boys returned to Captain Ferguson.

Inside the wigwam felt cosily warm after the chill air outside. A great log fire was blazing in the middle of the floor and the boys seated themselves on the pine brush which was strewn on the floor. Martin said: "I had always felt sorry for the Indians and their comfortless lives, but now I shall always think differently of them."

Peter Trant had overheard Martin's words and now relieved of assisting Captain Ferguson, he crossed over to the boys.

"No," he said, "they do not live in discomfort, these Indian tribes. But seeing is believing. Come here, you lads. Just look at this lining of skins fitted inside the wigwam wall. See how it keeps out all draughts, so closely does it fit to the ground. And the lining is as beautiful as a picture-book. Martin, count how many different animals you can see painted on this inner wall."

Martin began, but laughingly gave up the attempt, pleading his ignorance of many of the kinds of animals portrayed on the scene. Ralph and Peter Trant came to his rescue, and together they distinguished eagles and buzzards, swans and hawks and kites and rabbits and bears in confused medley.

Deerfoot now appeared to be easier in mind and in body. He expressed a wish that Captain Ferguson should wait to speak to the young men of the tribe who seemed bent on a more spectacular form

of trading. At that moment a young squaw appeared at the curtain of the lodge entrance and begged permission of the chief to present her ailing papoose to the white man to cure. Deerfoot seemed to hesitate, and then as eagerly as the young squaw he begged Captain Ferguson to attend to the ailing infant. The Captain, declaring that he was not a doctor, assented ; whereupon a procession of squaws and men lined up outside the chief's lodge beseeching a cure for their many ailments. Moved to pity, Captain Ferguson did his best, assisted by his own party. Long before he had attended to all his patients, he got up and shook his head sorrowfully. His good will was there, but his supplies were exhausted. He would have to return to Traders' Gate and reinforce his supplies. Deerfoot, who had sat to the side, smoking his pipe, woke to action at this decision. Good. The young men of the tribe who had been so troublesome should visit Traders' Gate when the Captain returned, and the Borlors would trade with the white man again. As the Captain's party took its departure, Deerfoot came to the entrance of his lodge and said :

" I have great faith in the Spirit of the Squaw River."

Captain Ferguson smiled kindly. As they started off on their homeward trek he said : " But I have greater faith in my medicine bag."

CHAPTER 12

HOMeward BOUND

WHEN the Indians were at peace with the fort, life became easier within Traders' Gate, and the men had greater leisure to pursue their pastimes. Peter Trant found much pleasure in helping Ralph and Martin to build a dog-sledge.

Captain Ferguson was called out to admire it when it was finished. It was a simple structure—two thin boards barely four feet long were nailed together edgeways and a three-cornered wooden contrivance was fitted to one end. A search within the fort had resulted in the possession of a pair of old skates. The boys were anxious now to experiment with the sledge, and welcomed, to a certain extent, the approaching winter. The snow fell heavier, and sharp frosts made it harder. At last the trial day came. Peter Trant harnessed the dogs, fitting collars of the softest leather over their heads. Each collar had a buckle fastened to either side, through which the traces were passed. Nathalie made much ado about the harness, fitting groups of tinkling bells below each dog's chin and adorning the top of each collar with fluttering bows of ribbon.

The dogs were harnessed in single file with Nala as leader. Nala was an experienced leader, and the three younger dogs co-operated in trying to follow him. Many were the rides the boys made in their

dog sled. They grew expert enough in handling the reins so that without difficulty they travelled almost at race-horse speed over the hard snow.

The boys were returning to Traders' Gate late one afternoon when they saw strangers entering the post.

"It's the hunters—the French-Canadians—on their way across country," said Ralph quietly, as he caught sight of them.

The boys ran to what was a kind of communal social room of the fort. Some of the hunters greeted Ralph, teasing him good-naturedly. Peter Trant called Martin aside.

"The Captain," he said, "is thinking over a suggestion of mine. These hunters are not going in your direction, but one man, Louis, is going across the river and to northward. He will be able to take you to a hunter's meeting-place. There he will hand you over to a companion who lives in your home district."

Martin danced around Peter merrily, but Ralph stood by, gloomy at the thought of losing Martin.

"Which is he, Peter? Tell me which, I want to make friends with my new companion."

"There he is—the second to the left by the stove. He is whistling. The tall man with the dark beard."

Martin went over to Louis, but found the hunter so taciturn that he soon returned to Ralph. Martin decided that Louis must be very tired; perhaps he would be more pleasant when they travelled alone. But would Captain Ferguson allow him to go? He set off for the dwelling-house in search of an answer.

He found that Peter Trant had forestalled him

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

and was answering the Captain's questions with emphatic avowals of Louis's reliability and his knowledge of the country. Simon, Louis's brother, had worked in the fort for some years.

Martin spent an anxious night, anxious on the one hand not to hurt Ralph by showing his eagerness to return, anxious on the other hand to set out for Marsden's Range, and, perhaps, to encounter more adventures in the company of the French hunter.

The boys were up betimes, and, each intent upon his own thoughts, went together to the bank of the Squaw River. Near the estuary they met a band of Borlors, docile enough, crossing over to Traders' Gate to trade. In their midst was Deerfoot, the Chief. He spoke to the boys, and as he left them said : " Honour the Squaw River. Its Spirit will grant you your prayers."

When he was out of sight Ralph said : " Martin, I shall ask the River Spirit one thing—that if we are parted we shall be together again soon."

" I too," said Martin solemnly. " I shall ask the Spirit the same thing. Deerfoot may be right and our prayer may be granted."

They returned to Traders' Gate. Martin read Captain Ferguson's decision in his face and ran forward, saying : " Thank you, sir. I truly am grateful, for I am anxious to return. They will be so concerned about me at Marsden's Range."

" I understand your feelings, Martin," said Captain Ferguson. " I have only hesitated because I was uncertain about Louis, and uncertain, too, about the companion who will take you home from the hunters' rendezvous. But Trant and the others

HOMeward BOUND

assure me that though Louis has many failings, he can be relied upon to carry out his word. Come then, Martin, let us help you to get ready for your journey."

It was planned that Martin should ride in the dog



The dog sledge sped over the sparkling snow

sledge, following in the wake of Louis, who would ride his horse. Ralph and Nathalie regained their spirits in helping to harness the dogs and fill the sledge with stores of food and warm blankets. Martin fought back the hot tears when the moment came to say good-bye to his good friends at Traders'

Gate. He looked at Louis's sullen face thinking how poor an exchange he was making for the happy, friendly faces within the fort. Louis's searching scrutiny had, however, the effect of strengthening Martin's resolve not to break down. The hunter should see that Martin was a manly boy.

"Good-bye ! Good-bye !" he called, scarce daring to look at the Fergusons.

Ralph ran beside the sledge and cried, " Perhaps the River Spirit will answer our prayer."

In brief time, Traders' Gate was far behind. Onward the dog sledge sped over the sparkling snow, the tinkling bells jingling merrily in the still air. Martin found no difficulty in following in the wake of Louis's horse, and felt intense pride in that he could show the hunter that he was no novice in handling the reins.

The sun set early that winter afternoon. They stopped for a brief rest and Louis turning to Martin said briefly :

" The younger dogs are getting tired. My bronco is still fresh. But we must push on. We do not wish to camp in the open when food and comfort await us at the hunters' lodge. There will be a young moon soon. We had better travel on."

Martin had been grateful for these words from Louis and was about to pursue the conversation further, but the hunter cut him short, and with a wave of his hand commanded him to return to the sledge. The rest had revealed to Martin his weariness. His limbs had grown stiff through sitting in a cramped position, and the continuous glare of the snow had grown wearisome to his eyes. He consoled himself that the journey's end was at hand and did

his utmost to drive his team as skilfully as when he had set out from the fort.

The young moon was climbing the sky. Here and there a planet burned like a cheerful lamp, guiding Louis towards his destination. Tired as he was, Martin was spellbound by the beauty around him. The prairie and the forest, the peaks and the lowlands, covered with sparkling snow, appeared like a fairyland in the moonlight.

It was a very sleepy Martin who roused himself when the dogs came to a standstill. For long afterwards Martin blessed the dogs for keeping in the track of the bronco by their own instinct rather than by his guidance. They had arrived at a great wooden hut, and the many tinklings of dog-bells told of the presence of many weary dogs.

Louis was greeted heartily by a group of men lounging near the entrance of the hut. When Martin appeared Louis told the boy to get within the hut.

Inside there was a busy scene. Preparations were in progress for the evening's feast, and the smell of the good food cheered Martin.

The boy thought of the tired dogs and went out through a side entrance to attend to them. He found that Louis had provided for them. He had arranged for their food and shelter, and as Nala ran up to him quite cheerily from an outhouse, Martin decided that Louis was not a bad man after all.

Poor Martin ! He had many occasions during that evening to console himself, for he found little to comfort him in the companionship of the rough and jeering hunters. When the meal was over, Louis summoned him to the far end of the main hall.

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

"Come outside," he said. "I am going to hand you over tonight to the man who will guide you home. I have decided to travel on while the moonlight holds."

Martin felt a measure of dismay at hearing these words. Louis was, after all, a link with Traders' Gate, and the boy could not but think that his decision to travel on was partly founded on his desire to be rid of his charge.

Louis and Martin stepped on to the wooden terrace in front of the hut.

"Here is the boy, Barcoll," said Louis, addressing a great figure lounging carelessly against the rail.

Martin found himself face to face with the man who had lost him. The boy blanched in the moonlight and would have withdrawn.

"Ha ! Ha !" cried Barcoll, drunkenly. "Come here, my little man. I—I once lost a boy and it seems I've gone and found one." He slapped Louis between the shoulders and guffawed drunkenly.

Martin cowered in the shadow. He was unprepared for this. All his bitterness and resentment against Barcoll welled up within him and he said : "I am that boy, Barcoll."

In reply to this Barcoll laughed even more drunkenly. "Not the same," he said. "His spirit perhaps. That first boy was mauled by a bear—at least so they say. His body no doubt has been devoured or lies hidden under the snow. Come, Louis, another drink. A stirrup-cup since you're away. Bring the foundling along with ye."

The trio made their way past great piles of buffalo skins to the main hall. A scene of wild confusion presented itself. The hall was large, but very full.

HOMeward BOUND

Near the parchment windows a group of fiddlers played with dexterous hands while the hunters, their weariness forgotten and now jovial with drink, danced and reeled on the wooden floor.

But in the midst of this merriment no one was sadder than Martin. How bitter an accident to have fallen into the hands of the treacherous Barcoll ! When Barcoll would grow sober again, he would realise that Martin was really the lost boy seeking to return to Marsden's Range. What would his reaction be ? The story had apparently reached the Range that Martin had been mauled by a bear. What would Barcoll do ? Martin shuddered at his thoughts. Perhaps Dain was in the hunters' lodge. Martin clung to this hope. Dain would see that he came to no harm. Eagerly, Martin searched among the merry hunters tripping around in the great circle before him. Disappointed in his search, he made for the far end of the hall where a group of older men were playing at dice. Perhaps Dain was there.

At the doorway he passed a group of Indians. They sat cross-legged, gathering into heaps the surplus food that the dancers flung towards them. Martin noticed that the hunters did not share their drink with the Indians. As he passed them, one of the Indians followed Martin's movements, and his ears were active on the boy's behalf as he listened to the conversation close by.

CHAPTER 13

SEEBA AGAIN !

"BARCOLL," said a hunter near the wall. "Barcoll, you're not only drunk, you're a fool."

"Steady, Karlan, though you may be right," caroused Barcoll, happily.

"Barcoll, listen !" said Karlan. "That boy is the Marsden boy who got lost—or to tell the truth whom you—you, Barcoll, lost."

"Hey ! What—what do you say ?" Barcoll made an effort to gain sobriety.

"I tell you, Barcoll, he's the boy you lost. Take him back to Marsden's Range and there'll be the devil to pay."

"Why ?" asked Barcoll, still fumbling among his confused senses.

"Why ?" said Karlan. "Because you lost him. The lad's got a tongue in his head, hasn't he ? And he's going to tell the tale."

"What odds ?" said Barcoll, shrugging his shoulders.

"No odds at all," said Karlan, getting impatient. "It seems you've no loyalty to your comrades either. Get them into trouble as well as yourself. Perhaps you will remember that I was one of the party. No odds at all !"

The derision in Karlan's words roused Barcoll. He looked across the hall and watched Martin as he continued his search for Dain.

SEEB A AGAIN!

“Karlan, Karlan,” said Barcoll, slowly. “What ought we to do?” Barcoll was quivering with anger, fear and resentment.

Karlan spoke callously. “It’s all easily done, Barcoll. The boy is supposed to have been mauled by a bear. I can act the bear. There are a thousand crannies to hide the body. Good. There’s just one little matter that must needs be put right between you and me before I do your dirty work, Barcoll. It’s a question of money. You know—”

The Indian did not wait to hear more. He got up and slinked towards a side entrance, bumping deliberately into Martin as he journeyed round the room. With a courtesy that was natural to him Martin apologised, though it was obvious that the fault was the Indian’s.

“Seeba—outside,” said the Indian, leaving Martin astonished.

Seeba here! His Red Indian friend—*here*! He must get outside and meet him before Barcoll got suspicious. He could see Barcoll deep in conversation with Karlan, though what they were discussing the boy did not know. The fiddlers struck up a merry tune, and in the confusion of the dance Martin went out of the side entrance, following in the wake of the Indian.

He had focused his eyes to gentle moonlight when he heard the light steps of moccasined feet. Then the Indian was beside him.

“Seeba—I am he, Martin,” he said.

Martin stared at the Indian in astonishment. Was this some trick? Then Seeba smiled, and that smile broke through the Indian’s disguise; and Martin saw in the old man his friend, Seeba.

"I do not love these hunters, Martin," he said. "I come merely to discover their wives. For that reason I dress as an old man, and come to the lodge to beg for food. But enough of that. We must away and we must go immediately."

Martin asked no questions. Enough for him it was to know that he was with Seeba, whom he could trust.

"Call your dog, if he is here," said Seeba.

Martin ran stealthily to the outhouse, where the dogs were fastened for the night. There was no need to summon Nala. He was there at the door barking joyously at his old friends. At a word of command from Seeba he stopped his barking.

"We must get away as quickly as we can," said Seeba.

When Martin spoke of the dog sledge, Seeba seemed tempted to use it. But at that moment the sound of the fiddling ceased, and the merriment died down.

"We must go immediately," said Seeba, "before they realise you have gone. I will explain matters to you later. Trust me, Martin."

Martin trusted Seeba readily enough. He knew that hardship lay before him, and perhaps perilous adventure. Even so, he was happy to be with Seeba, and rejoiced at every step that took him away from the hunters' lodge.

The snow in the lodge enclosure had been a thawing swamp, trodden under by man and beast. Outside the paling the snow lay even, and smooth as a sheet. The Indian's trained eye saw a danger therein. Seeba stooped down, swinging his blanket from his shoulder. He wrapped it around Martin and

SEEBa AGAIN!

then swung the boy over his shoulder as though he were a load of buffalo skins. Martin's head was concealed within the folds of the blanket, and sight and sound were muffled when Seeba tucked the boy's head into his armpit. The human bundle swung rhythmically to the Indian's stride. When they were out of sight of the hunters' lodge and had crossed a stream, Seeba undid the bundle. Martin emerged, gasping for air.

"Sorry, little one," said Seeba, "but I made sure that you did not speak. Sound travels far in this still air. I carried you, Martin, for it would not do to leave traces of your footsteps in the snow. I have sent Nala by another route. We will wait here till he joins us."

Quietly, consolingly, Seeba told Martin of the plan made by Barcoll and Karlan to destroy him. Martin tried to thank Seeba, but the Indian stopped him.

"You shall thank me, if it is your wish, when you are safe within Marsden's Range, but we have a long way to travel before we reach there."

At that moment Nala came bounding towards them.

Freshened by the rest and Seeba's comforting words, Martin set out, endeavouring to keep pace with the Indian. Nala followed beside them. When the moonlight grew dim and storm clouds darkened the sky, Seeba decided that they must find a resting-place immediately.

Seeba plunged into a hollow sheltered by great oaks that overhung a frozen stream. An avalanche of snow sheltered the dell from the river. Seeba made a resting-place for Martin in a decayed

tree-trunk. Martin, however, realising how much Seeba had already done for him, would not rest. Up he jumped, anxious to help the Indian as he prepared for their comfort.

Together they gathered the dead wood from the sheltering trees and together they scooped a hollow in the snow to build their fire. They had but little to eat, for Seeba was chary of their using the fragments he had garnered from the hunters' festive board. Seeba sat by the fire smoking his pipe, lost in thought. Martin was loth to disturb his meditations, but at length he broke the silence and said : " Seeba, I think our wisest plan is to get back to Traders' Gate."

Seeba nodded. Then he said : " Did you mark the way as you travelled ? Which way did the wind blow ? "

Martin shook his head. Then Seeba queried : " Which way did the snow drift ? "

Martin laughed and was emphatic. " From *all* sides, Seeba."

The boy realised how very much he had yet to learn before he could contemplate a life in the open.

Seeba said : " It were well that we travel north."

The Indian rose, and Martin thought he was going to observe the stars now fading in the dawning sky. But Seeba climbed the steep cliff and feeling the bark of an oak, cut gashes in the trunk. Martin learnt that the bark grew thickest where the tree faced north. Silently the pair headed in that direction.

Seeba was following a new route. He was less intent on reaching a destination than in separating the boy from Barcoll's evil schemes. He recognised

SEEBE AGAIN!

the Indian's dogged tenacity in Barcoll's half-caste temperament, and he knew that the hunter would not give up the chase until he had killed his quarry.

Martin was limping painfully, though he tried valiantly to keep pace with the Indian. He was growing hungry too, and welcomed the diversion when Nala darted off on a hunting expedition.

The travellers were nearing a wood of tall, dark pines near which a river sparkled and shone in the early morning light. Fearing for Nala's safety, Martin ran after the dog. He rounded a bend and found not Nala but *Sea-Gull, the old Indian squaw, gathering firewood!*

By signs and many gestures she rejoiced at meeting Martin again. She dropped her firewood, gathered her blanket around her, and led the boy towards her hut near the river.

Martin in turn expressed his delight at finding her safe, and rejoiced that she was comfortable in her new hut. He had entered the dwelling, and was admiring its size and neatness when he saw a man sitting within carving a stick. The man turned. Martin's joy turned to despair. Scarce three feet away was Dain!

"Is it really you, Master Martin?" Dain's welcome seemed sincere enough. Should Martin believe in his sincerity? How the boy wished that Seeba was at hand. "Sea-Gull has spoken much of you," Dain was continuing. "You were good to her, and she has troubled her mind much wondering about your safety."

The old squaw had signalled to Martin to seat himself by the fire. She was now busy replenishing the fire with logs she had set to dry.

"I have come here for a few days before I move north. I was anxious to see that all was well here with Sea-Gull and Silver Birch, her daughter. Silver Birch is my wife. She will return presently. She has gone trapping. But tell me how you come to be here. Surely you have not come alone?"

Martin still hesitated. Dare he take Dain into his confidence, or was Dain's tongue silver-smooth to trap him on Barcoll's behalf? Should he tell him that Seeba and Nala were outside? He was spared from making a decision, for at that moment Nala bounded into the hut and Seeba stood at the entrance.

A look of deep suspicion was interchanged between the Indian and the half-caste. Had they been prepared to express their feelings, each would have declared that his fears were founded on a desire for Martin's safety.

"How is it that you are not with Barcoll?" said Seeba, plunging into the thoughts that were uppermost in his mind.

"Barcoll is at the hunters' lodge if you would know," said Dain, through cynical lips. "I am here with my wife, Silver Birch, and her mother, before I make my way to Traders' Gate to settle some business with a man called Trant, whom I once met at the river junction."

"You are going to Traders' Gate? Then take me with you!" cried Martin, jumping up in his eagerness and forgetting his immediate peril in the thought of seeing Ralph again.

But a sharp look from Seeba silenced him, and the return of Silver Birch, a lithe and dark-eyed squaw, directed their thoughts to a meal.

SEEB A AGAIN!

Sea-Gull and Silver Birch hastened in their preparation of dinner when they realised how hungry the travellers were. Dain noted that the visitors were suspicious of him, and felt that their distrust had something to do with Barcoll. Sea-Gull advised him to be silent. In time she would learn what Seeba feared. Meanwhile, they would attend to the wants of their guests, and share the hospitality which the hut on the Moccasin Route offered.

CHAPTER 14

THE END OF THE TRAIL

SEVERAL days passed in residence at Sea-Gull's hut. Dain was anxious for Seeba to depart and Seeba was equally anxious that Dain should set forth for Traders' Gate alone.

Under pretence of setting traps for Silver Birch on the river bank, Seeba kept a stealthy watch lest Barcoll should appear. Questioning Martin in the guise of casual conversation, Dain got a hint of the danger which the boy feared. Thereupon Dain went out to the marsh to find Seeba. Clearly and sincerely he explained to the Indian that he knew nothing of Barcoll's evil scheming. He explained that he had quarrelled bitterly with Barcoll concerning his treatment of a sledge dog. Seeba was won over by Dain's obvious sincerity, and this resulted in the cancelling of his remaining fears. Together they planned for Martin's speedy return to Marsden's Range.

When Martin learnt their plans, he said very emphatically : " Dain must not come with us, Seeba."

" Why ? " asked Seeba, astonished.

Dain said nothing, but looked equally astonished.

" Can you not see," said Martin, " that Barcoll will take vengeance on Dain if he learns that he has taken me back home ? "

The two men realised the wisdom of the boy's

words, though Dain would have made light of the danger. A further conference was held that night over the hut fire. Sea-Gull gave valuable directions concerning the cross-country journey, and Silver Birch prepared food for the travellers to take with them.

A hard frost had settled when Martin and Seeba began their journey, homeward bound. The air was exhilarating, and Seeba crooned Indian songs. The frozen snow was solid beneath them and Martin and Seeba travelled easily. They crossed a frozen river and lake and made their way through a dark pine forest. They skirted a prairie, and presently found themselves on the banks of the Squaw River. Martin felt particularly pleased that he had recognised it without Seeba's assistance. The full moon was overhead.

"Light without warmth," said Seeba, gazing upward, "but the moon will light us to our destination. Look, Martin, what do you see there, to the right of the waterfall?"

"Marsden's Range!" said Martin, his voice quivering with excitement.

"It is near yet far," said Seeba, "for we have yet to cross the river. There is a canoe below the lower fall. We shall cross there."

Skilfully Seeba plied the paddle. Nala within the boat barked joyously at his reflection in the water. Martin could scarce hold himself within the boat so great was his joy in returning. When they had ascended the steep bank on the other side Seeba stopped suddenly, and called Nala to heel. The Indian had heard the tinkle of a dog's bell—a dog-drawn sledge perhaps. What if Barcoll trapped them at this moment? Seeba was taking no risks.

They made their way cautiously to one of the out-buildings of the settlement. In the lee of a wall, they observed a party in a sledge make its way to Marsden's Range. Martin was anxious to make his way to Jasper's hut. Jasper, he knew, was a sincere friend and would help him all he could ; but Seeba bade the boy remain at his side.

The dog sledge made its way through the orchard and stopped at the main entrance of the Marsden's dwelling. Two silhouettes on long, pointed snow-shoes made their way very cautiously after them.

A hearty laugh emerged from the sledge and then a voice hailed Roland who had hurried out to open the gate.

"We are the Fergusons, father and son, from Traders' Gate, seeking hospitality at Marsden's Range."

Martin had not waited to hear all the words. With a wild cry he made one long slide and was abreast the sledge, dancing wildly around Ralph and Captain Ferguson.

Even more joyful and hilarious was the entry of the travellers into Marsden's Range, and Uncle Malcolm and the aunts were beside themselves with happiness.

When the clamour had subsided a little the Marsdens began to understand that all the travellers had not journeyed together. Uncle Malcolm was anxious to get at Martin's story, but Aunt Isabel was determined that it should wait until the evening meal was over. Presently Aunt Ruth, very gravely, took Uncle Malcolm aside.

"Roland wishes to speak to you," she said.

Uncle Malcolm had become a greater invalid

during Martin's absence, and it was with difficulty that he rose from his chair.

"Tell Roland to come in, bringing his news with him," said Aunt Isabel, practical as ever.

Roland came. "It is sad news," he said, "but it is well that things are as they are. Jasper has returned with buffalo skins from the river junction; there he had news of Barcoll's death. He had fought with a fellow-hunter named Karlan, but the cause of the fight is not known."

Martin was now in safe hands, and Seeba, his mission over, declared his intention to go. And it was with great difficulty that Uncle Malcolm prevailed upon the Indian to stay the night. When Mr. Marsden spoke of rewarding him, Seeba very determinedly shook his head.

"I must away at sunrise," Seeba said simply. Not for the Indian this life within a closed space. "I was born for the wild and open country, and to it I must return."

"But, Seeba, I feel I owe you so much," Martin said. "I can never repay you for all that you have done."

Seeba looked at the boy very kindly and, very moved, would have hastened his farewell.

"Perhaps I shall never see you again, Seeba," said Martin sadly.

"I shall come when the wild geese fly back past Marsden's Range," Seeba promised.

Martin and Ralph were up early to escort Seeba on his way. When the Indian's lithe figure had disappeared on his lonely trail, Ralph said :

"Let us go to the wooden bridge, I want to talk to you."

THE REDSKIN TRAIL

They made their way along the river bank, Ralph speaking rapidly.

"I did not tell you about it last night because we were tired and you were excited enough as it was. Listen, Martin. Father has bought the land to the south-west of Marsden's Range. We are coming in the spring."

Martin's joy was beyond measure. He would be reunited with his friend.

"There's just one fly in the ointment," he said wistfully.

"There always is," said Ralph, "but what is it? Let's see if we can take it out."

Ruefully, Martin shook his head. "I fear not," he said. "Last night Uncle Malcolm said he was determined I should finish my schooling before I settled down on the Range."

Instead of looking disconsolate Ralph gave a wild whoop, and then executed a spectacular somersault on the bridge rail.

"You're going to school?" he said. "Where?"

"At Carr," said Martin.

Ralph gave another wild whoop.

"So am I," he said.

Later, in a more sober mood, they stood on the bridge. Martin said quietly:

"Ralph, the Indian chief, Deerfoot, was right. The Spirit of the Squaw River has granted our prayer. We shall be together again."

As they returned to Marsden's Range, Martin's heart rejoiced in the perils and blessings of the Redskin Trail.



